スレイヤーズすまっしゅ。

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神坂一
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Slayers Smash. 3:
The Season of Stickiness

By Hajime Kanzaka

Machine Translated and Edited by Eff_Efferson
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Translator Foreword:

This series has been around over 30 years and has over 30 volumes; no one has successfully translated it; It is abandoned and likely will never get a proper translation.
I have the means to translate it so I can read it, so that's what I did.
Here is the fixed up translation edited to near perfection as I read through it.
The entire series should be done soon, I just need to read through it and edit the document first. That's the main limitation here. It will be released on archive.org for archival purposes.

All my translations are free to derive from. Make your own edits if you want to fix up formatting and Grammar. Use them to help your own translations, I will officiate any fixes submitted into new editions.

Unmasking Unspo Kaiser

The headband guys and their friends were stomping their feet in frustration, but it was already too late.

One corner of the city was in a full-fledged festival frenzy. Countless stalls lined the streets, and colorful decorations were scattered everywhere. Around the stadium, a crowd of spectators swarmed. Next to a banner that read **"726th Long-Distance Prone Crawling Race,"** a large crowd jostled for a view.

This city, Finris, was the birthplace of many famous warriors, so it was a place where sports were incredibly popular. I had heard rumors that some kind of competition—large or small—was held here almost year-round. Thinking it would be a good story for the road, I decided to stop by, and it turned out the festival was in full swing.

Calling it a "stadium" was a bit of a stretch; it was just a vast open space with lines drawn on the ground. Ropes strung around the perimeter served as the boundary for the spectator seats. I was wandering back and forth, trying to find a spot with even a slightly better view, when—

"Hey, you!"

I turned around at the sharp call to find four muscular men standing there. They were all sporting short "sports-cut" hair and wearing tank tops emblazoned with the word "STAFF." All of their gazes were fixed on me.

"...Me?" I asked.

"Yeah," the man in the white headband replied with a sullen face. "I don't recognize your face."

"I'm traveling."

"Don't tell me you're..." The headband man narrowed his eyes. "You wouldn't happen to be part of the **Unspo Group**, would you?"

"...Huh?" I frowned at the nonsensical question. "Unspo... what's that?"

But before I could get an answer—

"Fuhahahaha! Fuhahahaha!"

A boisterous laugh echoed through the blue sky!

"Th-This voice...!"

The men looked visibly shaken, frantically scanning the surroundings. The spectators and I did the same.

"There! On top of the north pole!"

Someone shouted, and everyone's eyes snapped to the spot. Standing tall atop a pole away from the banner was a single man clad in a full-body red bodysuit! He was quite tall, with muscles that were unnecessarily rippling—there wasn't a single part of him that wasn't suspicious!

"Unspo Kaiser!" the headband man near me cried out in shock.

"...What kind of name is that?" I muttered. I couldn't help but make the observation.

Looking down at the people from his high perch, the man called Unspo Kaiser raised his voice.

"Citizens of Finris! It is well and good to sweat and indulge in sports! However, know that it is the height of folly to look down upon and belittle values other than sports! *Tooo-yah!*"

Having said his piece, he kicked off the pole, soared through the air, and slammed his right fist into the ground upon landing!

THOOM!

The ground exploded! Screams and shouts erupted as the earth caved in from the impact. A cloud of dust rose, blocking everyone's vision and fueling the chaos.

"Calm down! Everyone, stay calm!" the headband man and his crew yelled.

Fortunately, nothing else seemed to be happening. Eventually, the dust began to settle, and the commotion died down. When the air cleared and I looked toward the stadium, all that remained was the cratered ground.

The location was right on the race course. They definitely couldn't hold the competition like this. Whether he escaped in the confusion or not, there was no sign of Unspo Kaiser anywhere.

"Not again! Dammit!"

"Hey..." I started.

The headband man's voice hit my back. *Ugh, this is so tedious*. I turned around to find a suspicious glare directed at me.

"I didn't get an answer. You aren't with the Unspo Group, are you?"

"I don't know anything about that. If you're going to investigate, you should check the people who were positioned in the front row. Though, they've probably all scattered by now."

The man looked taken aback. "The front row...? Why there?"

"When that masked-bodysuit guy vanished, there was a huge cloud of dust, right? There's no way that dust was kicked up just by his punch."

"Eh!? It wasn't?"

I let out a sigh as the headband man widened his eyes.

"Hypothetically, if someone hit the ground with enough power to do that, they'd go flying upward from the recoil before the ground even broke. So, it's more natural to assume he had accomplices in the crowd who used some method to kick up the dust to let him escape."

"And the front row would be the most convenient spot for that."

I didn't say it out loud, but the accomplices likely used magic. Specifically, the **Bephis Bring** (Tunneling Spell). They probably created a hollow space under the stadium beforehand; when the Kaiser landed, the ground collapsed into the hollow, making it look like his punch smashed the earth. As for the escape, they probably used **Dill Brand** (Explosion Array) in a donut shape around him to kick up the dirt. Since the

Kaiser was talking right until the end, he wouldn't have had time to chant. It was almost certain he had help.

"Ooh..."

The men let out sounds of admiration at my simple explanation. The headband man suddenly turned a pleading gaze toward me.

"Hey! Did you notice anything else?"

"...Before that, I want to ask: what exactly is that guy, and who are you people?"

"His name is—Unspo Kaiser."

The man looked at the gouged-out stadium and began to explain.

"He's a mysterious man who started appearing about six months ago. In this sports-obsessed city, he shouts nonsense about 'Anti-Sports' and barges into various tournaments to mess them up."

I see. So "Unspo" stands for "Anti-Sports." It was a painfully literal name. Easy to understand, at least.

"At first, he was acting alone, but for some reason, collaborators appeared. People started calling them the Unspo Group. We organized a vigilante group to stop them, handling security and such. I'm the person in charge, **Scolb Elentile**. But we still don't know the Kaiser's identity or the full scale of the group. That's why I questioned you since you're a stranger... Look, if you aren't with them, would you mind helping us—"

"Hahahaha. Now, now, Scolb-kun. You shouldn't involve a traveler in such matters."

I shifted my gaze toward the voice that cut in. The shadow that appeared was a full head taller than Scolb and his friends. He had short-cropped red hair. Even under a loose jacket, the sheer volume of his muscles was unmistakable.

"Mr. Fizel!"

At the sight of him, Scolb and the others straightened their backs.

"This is a problem for our city," Fizel said. "This person is clearly a traveler. You mustn't force them to cooperate."

"I-I'm sorry. We just want to catch the Unspo Group no matter what..."

While Scolb and the others shrank back after the scolding... well... how should I put this...

"Um, Mr. Fizel?" I asked him, feeling a bit hesitant.

"Hm? What is it?"

"A moment ago... weren't you laughing on top of a pole in a mask and a bodysuit?"

"....."

A dead silence filled the air. Pure, white silence.

Yes. This Fizel guy in front of me—though his clothes were different—had the exact same physique and voice as the Unspo Kaiser who just appeared. He probably stripped off the suit and mask and handed them to an accomplice. Honestly, if this turned out to be a different person, I'd be more shocked.

After a brief silence, Fizel recoiled several steps with a loud *skid!*

"Wh-at...!? Wh-wh-what are you talking about!?"

Ah. He stammered.

Faced with such an obvious reaction, Scolb immediately jumped in to deny my words.

"What kind of stupid thing are you saying! There's no way Mr. Fizel is Unspo Kaiser!"

...Wait, what?

"Listen! This Mr. Fizel is a living legend! The **Sports King**! He swept every award and set numerous records over the last two years! On the other hand, Unspo Kaiser is just a scumbag who claims to be anti-sports!"

At the word "scumbag," Fizel's temple twitched, but Scolb continued without noticing.

"There's no way those two are the same person! You're being incredibly rude!"

"But look! His build and voice are identical—I mean, they're the same!"

"Ha! I thought you might be sharp, but I guess I was wrong! Are your eyes made of glass!? Open them wide and look! The shape of the pectorals is completely different!"

"That's it!? That's your checkpoint!?"

I didn't care about the shape of his pecs! Even if the muscle definition was slightly different, the height and voice were exactly the same! I could understand not wanting to doubt a local hero, but come on, use your brain a little!

"Fine, then let me ask you this! You said he was the Sports King for the last two years, but what about this year?"

"He isn't allowed to participate in the tournaments this year!"

"And why is that?"

Because he started working as Unspo Kaiser, I thought to myself.

"Ah. Actually, I want to know the reason for that too," Scolb said.

Both Scolb and I turned our eyes toward Fizel. He flinched for a split second before speaking.

"That's... well, you see! Yes! It's to nurture the younger generation!"

"The younger generation?"

He nodded at my question.

"Indeed! Last year and the year before, I won too many competitions by too wide a margin. Because of that, an atmosphere started to grow among the youth—they felt that losing to me was unavoidable and natural."

I could see that. Given how much Scolb trusted him, it wasn't surprising that such an aura existed.

"That atmosphere robs the youth of their hunger for victory and their fighting spirit. I realized this couldn't continue, so I decided to step away from the competitions for a while! I swore to myself that I would only return to the field when everyone regained their fighting spirit and felt like challenging me once more!"

".....A-As expected, you're amazing, Mr. Fizel!"

Scolb was moved to tears by the grand speech. He turned his eyes toward me.

"See!? There's no way such a magnificent man could be Unspo Kaiser!"

"Now, don't be so hard on her, Scolb," Fizel soothed. "She's likely just shaken after encountering such an incident. It's only natural."

I pointed my finger straight at that suspicious Unspo Kaiser—who was clearly just the local "muscle Man" in a mask—and declared her identity. But Skolb, without a second thought, gave him his unconditional support.

"It’s a bit much to ask a civilian slip of a girl to tell the difference between muscle types," he said dismissively.

I vowed that I would be the one to unmask the Unspo Kaiser, but Skolb’s reaction was pure condescension. It was infuriating.

"Wha—hooooold on just a second!" I finally shouted.

The truth was staring him right in the face, yet for some reason, Skolb remained oblivious. Fine, I could accept that. Some people in this world are dense beyond my wildest imagination. But! If I just backed down after being treated like some delusional amateur by someone like Skolb, it would be a disgrace to the name of Lina Inverse!

Still, arguing here wasn't going to get me anywhere. In that case!

"I'd appreciate it if you didn't underestimate me! I don't mean to brag, but this Lina Inverse has solved all sorts of incidents in every place I've traveled!"

"Even if you say that..." was Skolb’s belittling response. "You just finished saying something completely off the mark."

"Then fine!"

"In exchange, if I manage to do it, you'd better give me a hefty reward! If I can't, then obviously I don't need a thing. How's that? It’s not exactly a bad deal for you, right?"

"....."

"N-no, I couldn't ask that of a traveler..." Fizel started to say, but I cut him off with a glare.

"I’m doing this because I want to!" I snapped, silencing him. "I won't get in your way, and I have no intention of making you lose face! I’m just saying I’ll cooperate in unmasking this delinquent. Is there a problem with that?"

"....."

Fizel went silent, seemingly at a loss for words. Skolb, failing to notice his suspicious behavior, wore a mocking grin.

"Well, fine. If you think you can really do it, give it a shot. If you manage to do something about the Unspo Kaiser, I’ll fork over a reward."

"All right. I heard those words. Better be prepared, 'cause I'm gonna fleece you for everything you've got!"

I flashed a fearless smile back at him. And so, I began an investigation that was either incredibly simple or incredibly futile: unmasking a culprit whose identity was already painfully obvious.

"Hey, why do we gotta stake out Mr. Fizel’s house?"

That night, lurking in the darkness, Skolb whispered under his breath. I had called him out, had him lead me to Fizel’s place, and proposed a night watch.

It was a single building in a corner of town that looked somewhat like a warehouse. According to Skolb, that was Fizel’s house. He lived there alone, and the place doubled as his training room.

Crouched in the shadows of an alleyway across the street, I kept my eyes on the house and spoke.

"If—and this is just my theory—Fizel is actually the Unspo Kaiser, he’ll have to make contact with his cronies at some point."

"—I keep telling you, Mr. Fizel isn't that kind of person," Skolb muttered, talking in his sleep again.

I didn't bother arguing. Instead, I continued, "On the other hand, if he’s unrelated like you say, then he’s actually in danger of being targeted by the Unspo Kaiser."

"Wh... what...?"

As he sucked in a breath, I pressed on.

"Fizel has won all sorts of awards over the last few years, right? He's basically the representative and symbol of sports lovers. It’s perfectly plausible that the 'Anti-Sport' crowd would want to crush that symbol, don't you think?"

"N-now that you mention it... But even if some weaklings who hate sports attacked him, there's no way the great Fizel would lose!"

"Maybe so, if they fought fair and square. But what if they attack him while he's sleeping? Besides, the enemy might have weapons. Or they might use attack spells."

"I... I see..." Skolb let out a panicked groan and leaned out to stare at Fizel's house.

"In short, whether he's the Unspo Kaiser or not, there's a point to keeping watch. Understand?"

"If that's the case, I guess I'm convinced... But man, a night watch every night is gonna be rough."

He complained, but I knew there was no need for worry. After all, the Unspo Kaiser's true identity was going to be revealed tonight.

The night deepened. The moon traveled across the starry sky. I waited for the moment the town fell silent.

"——They're here!" I let out a small, sharp voice in the darkness.

"Eh...?"

"Where...?"

"They're hiding themselves well, but I can tell by their presence!"

"Their 'presence'... man, you're amazing."

"What—?"

"Let's go! Follow me!"

I leaped out of the alley and dashed across the street, killing the sound of my footsteps. Skolb followed a moment later.

"Light!"

Naturally, there was no sign of any intruders.

"Shh! Keep your voice down!"

I crept up to the house and pressed myself against the door to listen. The windows were shuttered, so I couldn't see inside. Since no light was leaking through the cracks, he was likely already asleep.

Alright. I chanted a spell under my breath.

"Damu Brass!"

BOOOOM!

With a single strike, I blew the lock off the door! Fizel's panicked voice came from deep inside, and Skolb's flustered mumbles came from behind me. Ignoring them both, I charged in while chanting my next spell! Just as a person-shaped shadow appeared, my spell was complete!

The conjured magical light illuminated the interior of the building. It was a wide space with several rooms. Standing before me was Fizel, shielding his eyes from the glare, wearing pajamas that didn't suit him at all.

"You, the girl from today...! And Skolb too...?"

"Intruders have broken in!"

I slipped past him. If Fizel came from this direction, the bedroom had to be that way!

"Wh... intruders...?"

"It seems so!" Skolb followed after me.

".....Wait, hold on a minute!"

After a moment's delay, Fizel finally snapped out of it and followed us. But by then, I had already reached his bedroom.

"Light!"

I cast the magical light again, and the room was flooded with brightness. It was a somewhat large room for a bedroom, containing a small window, a plain closet, and a sturdy-looking large bed. Dumbbells and various other training pieces were scattered across the floor.

I started chanting my next spell as I ran straight toward the closet.

"Is it here?!"

I flung the double doors open, but inside were just trousers, shirts, and towels. Tsk. A miss.

"W-what are you doing?!"

Fizel rushed over, his face pale, but—

"Damu Brass!"

CRASH!

The blow I unleashed pulverized the bed! Fizel and Skolb both froze in their tracks.

"Oh...?"

I walked over to the wreckage of the bed and spoke in a flat, rehearsed tone.

"Why is something like this under Fizel's bed?"

I picked it up and held it out toward the two of them.

"An Unspo Kaiser costume."

It was unmistakably the red full-body tights and mask I had seen earlier that day—the smoking gun.

My plan for tonight had been simple: to find this outfit. Fizel would almost certainly keep the Kaiser costume close at hand. Probably in a shallow hiding spot like a closet drawer or under the bed. Having made that read, I had dragged Skolb along on some

pretext, lied about an intruder, and stormed the house. Then, right in front of Skolb’s eyes, I "found" the Unspo Kaiser costume hidden in Fizel's home.

Fizel and Skolb didn't move. No, they *couldn't* move once they saw the object under the broken bed.

"....."

Fizel’s trembling lips squeezed out a few shaking words.

".....Why is an Unspo Kaiser costume in a place like that...?"

"Don't play dumb at this stage!!" I yelled, finally losing my temper at his blatant act. "The outfit was found under the bed you were just sleeping in! There's no other answer except that you hid it! In other words! Fizel, you are the Unspo Kaiser!"

I pointed my finger sharply at him. Fizel averted his eyes.

"N-no, that's not the case at all."

His voice had jumped an octave, and a nasty sweat was breaking out all over his forehead. Beside him, Skolb was still frozen, perhaps from the sheer shock of it.

"Ugh, you're a sore loser! Then let me ask you this! Why was the Unspo Kaiser's outfit under your bed?! Can you explain it as anything other than you being the Kaiser?!"

"Th-that's..."

Fizel’s eyes darted around frantically until he seemingly hit upon an idea.

"T-t-t-that's right! It was the intruder! You guys said it yourself! An intruder came in! That intruder must have zoomed past me and s-s-s-slid the clothes under the bed just to frame me!"

"—So that was it!"

The one who shouted wasn't me—it was Skolb. Skolb nodded vigorously at Fizel.

"That definitely makes sense!"

He believed it! This guy believed Fizel’s sleep-talking again!

"No it doesn't!! Skolb! How can you believe such an impossible story?!"

I shouted in a hurry, but Skolb just looked at me with a condescending face.

"Like I said earlier today, there's no reason for the Sports King, Mr. Fizel, to engage in anti-sport activities. There's nothing wrong with Mr. Fizel's theory."

Ugh. This was infuriating. It was true that even I didn't know *why* Fizel was playing the Unspo Kaiser. However, based on his appearance, attitude, and the situation, there was no doubt he was the one.

But Skolb's blind, cult-like respect for the Sports King was making him blind to the truth. I refused to back down and kept arguing.

"There's plenty wrong with it! You say an intruder left the clothes, but where did this intruder go?!"

At my words, he looked around the room, but of course, there were only the three of us. There was only one door in or out. There was a window, but it was locked from the inside. The closet was wide open, and there was nowhere else to hide.

"Now that you mention it! There's no one here!"

You just noticed?!

"Where on earth could they have—?"

"That's because there was no intruder from the start! The one who hid the costume under the bed was Fizel!"

"But you were the one who said there was an intruder!"

I wanted to scream that I was lying, you idiot! But I bit my tongue. Skolb had a powerful desire to believe in Fizel. If I admitted the intruder was a lie, he would undoubtedly choose Fizel's word over a self-admitted liar's. In that case...

"True, I was keeping watch outside and sensed an intruder!"

I declared this with my chest puffed out, not showing a hint of intimidation toward Skolb's smug face.

"But that was just my imagination!"

"WHATTTTTT?!!"

For some reason, Skolb and Fizel shouted in perfect harmony. I ignored them and pushed forward.

"I mean, what even is a 'presence'?! There’s no way such an illogical thing exists! Let alone sensing it! It was my imagination! All of it! So, there was no intruder from the beginning!"

I was about to follow up with, "Therefore, the Unspo Kaiser's identity is—" but I was cut off.

"No! It wasn't your imagination!"

It was Fizel who shouted.

"Lina, was it? I have proof! You definitely sensed an intruder! Because I, too, clearly felt the presence of an intruder sneaking in and hiding the Unspo Kaiser's clothes under my bed!"

"What kind of presence is that?! I mean, you felt something like that and just gave no reaction? Even if that's true, it doesn't explain where the thief disappeared to!"

"...No... I don't quite understand that part myself, but..."

"You sensed the presence of the thief hiding clothes under the bed, right?! Then you should be able to tell how they vanished afterward by their presence too!"

Under my relentless questioning, sweat beaded on Fizel's forehead. Alright, just one more push! I opened my mouth to speak—

"I’ve got it! I understand now!"

But Skolb shouted out just a split second faster than me. With his eyes sparkling from a flash of inspiration, he looked back and forth between Fizel and me.

"The thief broke into Fizel-san's bedroom! Detecting that presence, Lina, you blew the front door apart with a spell! Fizel-san woke up in surprise and left the room to see what happened! At that moment, the thief hid the clothes under the bed and followed Fizel-san out of the room! They hid in the shadows for a moment, waited for

us to rush into the room and for Fizel-san to head back, and then slipped outside as we passed each other!"

Wow! That was completely different from the facts, but it actually made sense!

Dammit, Skolb! Why did your brain have to start working *now* of all times?

"Umu! Come to think of it, I did faintly sense the presence of something hiding clothes under the bed at incredible speed, leaving the room, and lurking in the shadows!"

Fizel immediately jumped on the suggestion. Just what kind of "presence" is that?!

Of course, if a thief had really been lurking there, I would have sensed them. But saying that was useless. After all, I had just finished insisting that his "presence" sensing was just his imagination.

Skolb looked at me with a look of utter triumph. "See! I told you Fizel-san wasn't the Unspo Kaiser!"

".....Listen... all you've explained is that there *might* have been a thief. You haven't proven that Fizel isn't the Unspo Kaiser."

"But doesn't that prove there's a hole in your sleepy-headed assumption that Fizel-san is the Kaiser?"

I... gah...

Internally, I groaned. Perhaps this Skolb, despite the problem of his unconditional devotion to Fizel, was actually...

...actually somewhat smart?

Then, how should I move the conversation forward?

I thought for an instant and reached an answer immediately. It was useless to push any further here. No, it was worse than that. If Fizel came up with some nonsense

like, "Actually, Lina is a member of the Unspo Group and is lying to frame me," Skolb would probably believe it without a second thought.

I definitely wanted to avoid that. So, I let out a deliberate sigh.

"It looks like we won't reach a conclusion by arguing here. Let's change our approach. I want to ask, are there any large-scale sports tournaments coming up in this city soon?"

"There's a long-distance running race using the city streets in two days," Skolb answered instantly.

"In two days? That soon?"

As I raised my voice, Fizel added,

"Yes. It is a quite popular tournament, and many spectators line the course. If you don't care about the size, there's a giant pumpkin lifting competition tomorrow morning, and a jelly relay race in the afternoon."

Taken aback by the explanation, I stammered, "..... I heard this city had a lot of sports events... but every day? Isn't that a bit too many?"

"I don't think so. That's the best part of this city, Finris," Skolb said.

"No, I'm not saying the frequency is bad. I'm just wondering... if the people in this city have tournaments this often and everyone comes to watch... just when on earth do they work—"

"Don't ask that."

For some reason, Skolb and Fizel spoke in perfect unison.

...They don't work, do they... maybe...

Deciding not to touch that subject, I looked Fizel straight in the eye.

"—Anyway. If that long-distance race is a popular event, the Unspo Kaiser will definitely show up. Because it's a gathering of people, it's the perfect place to show off his anti-sport ideology."

"Of course, he might not show up if the Unspo Kaiser is actually just a spineless coward whose only goal is to cause a stir without any principles or beliefs."

At my blatant provocation, Fizel's vein throbbed!

"No, he will appear! The Unspo Kaiser will surely appear on that day!"

"Heh..... and why can you say that with such certainty?"

"I just explained the reason! Besides, my instincts as a sportsman tell me he'll be there!"

"Well, I'm looking forward to it. To put it simply, we just have to catch the guy red-handed, and that'll be the end of it."

"Hoh. Quite a lot of confidence! Interesting! An opponent that the city people haven't been able to catch until now! If you think you can catch him, then try it!"

"I will. Just you wait."

That was a de facto declaration of war. Beside the oblivious Skolb, our gazes clashed with sparks!

The city was buzzing from early that morning. Compared to the same time on previous days, the number of people filling the streets was overwhelming.

Passing through the bustling streets, Skolb and I arrived at a wide, circular space on the outskirts of the city. The area was overflowing with people. Pushing through the crowd, we reached a staff tent set up in a corner of the venue. Spectator seats were installed around the perimeter.

Instead of my usual clothes, I was wearing a tank top given to me by Skolb with the word "STAFF" on it. The color of the letters identified me as security personnel, which supposedly allowed me to move around relatively freely.

"—Do you think he'll come?"

I nodded at Skolb's murmur. The Unspo Kaiser would definitely show up. The problem was—when and at what timing?

The athletes would start from this main venue, circle a designated course through the city, and return here. In other words, this place was both the start and the finish. It was the optimal spot for the Unspo Kaiser to appear and make his selfish claims.

However, there was no guarantee he would appear in this exact spot. It didn't necessarily have to be here. For the Unspo Kaiser, there was no point unless he showcased his ideology in a conspicuous place, which was why security was heavy here.

That meant there were other places to draw attention—for example, he could appear where the lead pack of runners was after the race started.

I had received a map of today's course from Skolb beforehand, but the course went all through the city. Identifying the exact attack site was difficult. In that case, I had no choice but to move with the lead pack and see what the opponent would do... but that sounded quite tedious.

While sitting on a log used as a bench in the staff tent and waiting for a while, the opening ceremony eventually began. Some important-looking person came out and gave a boring speech.

In the middle of it, the venue started buzzing. Thinking he had arrived, I looked around, but the Unspo Kaiser was nowhere to be seen?

"—Skolb."

Amidst the commotion, a man wearing a staff shirt approached and whispered,

"Apparently, the Unspo Kaiser has been caught on West Twilight Street...!"

"—What!"

Skolb's expression changed as he stood up, and a stir spread among the other staff members packed in the tent. The buzz in the venue was likely due to hearing that rumor.

But.

"It's a trap."

I threw cold water on the excitement. I looked at the staff member who brought the report.

"Who did you hear it from? Have you confirmed it?"

"Eh...? No, everyone in town was saying so..."

I dared to state it flatly.

"Someone from the Unspo Group is spreading a rumor. To lure us out to that Twilight Street, you see."

"But what if it's not a rumor and it's true?"

To Skolb's question, I replied,

"Nothing. If it's true, it means the Unspo Kaiser is caught, so there's no need for everyone to move in a panic, right?"

Convinced by the explanation, the staff member who brought the report nodded.

"I see. Well, I'll go check it out for now!"

Leaving those words, he ran off into the crowd.

"—Well then."

I looked at the map showing the course. After leaving this venue, the athletes would head onto the street and go East. Looking for the Twilight Street mentioned in the report, it was in the exact opposite direction.

In that case, I had a good idea of the target.

"Well, let's go, Skolb."

"Go..... where...?"

"To where the Unspo Kaiser is, of course."

I declared as I folded the map and stood up, giving a firm nod. Even during this exchange, the important person's greeting continued on and on.

The crowds of people lining the road along the course were so thick they could hardly move. I was looking down at that scene from the sky.

After leaving the venue, I grabbed Skolb and used a levitation spell to fly above the city, following the course.

As I traced the course with my eyes, I spotted a large five-story building—perhaps a government office—with a banner hanging between two poles at the entrance.

He was on that flat red roof.

Controlling the spell to get closer, I began chanting an incantation under my breath.

But slightly before it was finished—whether he sensed my presence, acted on instinct, or it was just a coincidence—the figure in the red mask looked up, saw us, and wore an expression of shock!

"Ice Arrow!"

He noticed me! For now, I released the spell I had just finished chanting, figuring it was worth a shot. Over a dozen arrows of cold air formed in the void and rained down onto the roof, but the opponent instantly jumped back and dodged!

I released the spell and landed on the roof with Skolb. On the wide roof, we faced a figure in a red full-body suit and mask.

"I found you, Unspo Kaiser!"

"Impossible...! Why are you here?"

The Kaiser spoke in Fizel's voice exactly. He’s here! I wished he'd at least put some effort into disguising his voice, but there was no use mentioning it.

"Your fake info operation backfired. The moment I realized it was a lie, it was like you were saying, 'I'm going to strike in a different place than the rumored one before the truth can be confirmed.' And you were almost certainly going to appear from a high place. It's advantageous for standing out, and below is full of people—plus, the roof provides camouflage. That's why—here," I said, pointing at the roof.

As I spoke, the Kaiser kicked off the roof and leaped into the void!

"Ah!" Skolb shouted in shock next to me.

Too naive! I had already anticipated several patterns for how he would get down, and I had started chanting the spell the moment he began his dialogue!

The spell was finished as I ran after him!

"Raywing!"

Manipulating a high-speed flight spell that enveloped me in a wind barrier, I pursued him. Beyond the roof, I saw the Kaiser grabbing onto the hanging banner! Using the momentum of his jump to tear the banner, he swung down like a pendulum and landed right in the middle of the road!

Of course, a normal banner wouldn't tear so conveniently. He must have tampered with it last night.

In my high-speed flight, I easily caught up to him! I slammed into the Kaiser, who hadn't yet recovered his stance from landing!

The figure in the red full-body suit went flying and rolling from the impact! If I hadn't been wearing the wind barrier, you might have heard the opponent's scream.

I released the spell, landed, and dashed toward the Kaiser!

Aiming for the red back as he lay face down, I raised my foot to bring it down—

"Too naive!"

With a roar, the Kaiser rolled over and tried to sweep my supporting leg!

But I’ve dealt with plenty of stubborn acquaintances! I had already anticipated an immediate recovery! I kicked off the ground with my supporting leg and jumped over the Kaiser!

As I landed, I turned around and charged toward the Kaiser as he picked himself up! Running up, I threw a right punch aimed at the Kaiser's jaw! If I grazed the jaw, even with my weak strength, I could rattle the opponent's brain and incapacitate them for a moment!

But the Kaiser surely knew that much!

"I said you're too naive!"

With a relaxed voice, the Kaiser stepped forward and took my punch with his stomach!

If the impact point shifted, my punch would be nothing but a puny tap. Against the Kaiser's thick muscles, it would be easily repelled!

That's likely what the Kaiser thought.

But.

"Mono Volt!"

The moment of contact, I slammed the lightning spell I had prepared directly into the Kaiser!

Against this, he didn't stand a chance.

His body gave one violent shiver, and the Unspo Kaiser collapsed onto the ground!

Yes! I knew that if I engaged this type of opponent in a physical brawl, he would dare to take my punch head-on—and my plan was a total success!

But this wasn't the end. Members of the Unspo Group should be nearby, mingling with the crowd to help him escape. Among them, there would be those who could use magic. Because I was fighting the Kaiser physically, they wouldn't have been able to provide support and were likely reeling internally from their leader being taken down.

In that case—

"You members over there!"

While keeping a sharp eye on the fallen Kaiser, I raised my voice.

"I know you're there! And I know there's someone who uses magic too!"

I looked around the area and called out to the people lined up.

"The ones who just moved are the members of the Unspo Group! If you want to bash them, feel free!"

At that moment, screams and roars swirled along the roadside of the long-distance running course.

In a room of the red-roofed government office, while the tournament began without further delay, nearly twenty men and women were gathered. Me, Skolb, and more than ten security staff. And then, there was the Unspo Kaiser, tied up securely with ropes, along with the three members of the Unspo Group who had been beaten up at the scene. Incidentally, since I didn't know the names of the three and they might use magic, I had them gagged so they couldn't chant spells.

"Now then."

"Now that things have come this far, I'm going to have to ask you to give it up, Unspo Kaiser. —No—wait."

I stepped toward Unspokaiser, who was glaring at me while clenching his back teeth. I reached for the mask, and what appeared from beneath it was a body wearing a tank top and... some kind of cotton-like stuffing.

The Scorps began to stir again as they saw his deflated appearance.

"No doubt about it...!"

".....Ah..... that muscle definition is..."

Mixed into someone's murmur were tints of astonishment and disappointment. I didn't really care, but I snatched away the rest of the disguise from those guys who apparently could only identify individuals by their musculature.

The face that appeared from beneath caused Scolb to buzz with a heavy, restless energy.

".....Th-this can't be...!"

Following the stunned murmur Scolb, the security staff shouted one after another:

"That face...!"

"He looks exactly like Mr. Fizel!"

"Wait... what?"

While I stumbled back for a moment in surprise, they continued to shout regardless:

"But... the shape of the pectorals is completely different."

"Come to think of it, the deltoids don't match either."

"But the face is a dead ringer... I see! I've got it! They're twins!"

"Like hell that's the reason!"

With a scream, I used all my strength to rip apart the bodysuit Unspo kaiser was wearing.

".....No way..."

Scolb muttered blankly and fell to his knees in despair.

"To think that *the* Mr. Fizel... was Unspo kaiser..."

"No. I've been saying that since the very beginning, haven't I?"

Whether my sullen retort entered their ears or not, they stared at Fizel with eyes full of confusion.

"Why, Mr. Fizel! You, who were called the Anti-Sport King, why were you doing things that advocated against sports...!"

"That was a question for me, too."

When questioned, Fizel maintained an expression that looked somewhat enlightened.

"That... is not something that should be spoken of right now."

He spat out a line that sounded meaningful for some reason.

...Hmm. It piqued my interest. Since I had caught Unspokaiser and exposed his identity, my job was over. I should have just handed him over.

"What are you acting all cool for?"

I dismissed Fizel’s line with a tone of utter mockery.

"In any case, it’s probably some reason like you didn't want your own records to be broken by others, so you decided to get in their way, right?"

"How did you—!"

"Don't 'How did you' me!"

As Fizel let out a shout of shock, I shouted in shock as well.

Wait, what?! Really?! Was that pathetic motive actually the bullseye?!

At my flustered attitude, Fizel snapped out of it.

"N-no! Wrong, wrong! That’s not it at all! Forget what I just said, forget it!"

His voice completely cracked.

Of course, there were likely other members of the Unspo Group, but investigating that was Scolb's job. His eyes were swimming like crazy, though.

...Even though I was the one who poked at it... I kind of wished I hadn't asked.

But for me, not knowing the reason why Fizel did this felt unsettled.

Ignoring my growing exhaustion, Fizel began to break into an unpleasant sweat.

"N-no, the real reason is that! Look! Uh, yes! Right!"

I didn't expect him to talk even if I pressed him. In this town, sports were held in high regard. In times like this, the best move was to accuse the opponent of a shameful motive, let them deny it, and draw the truth out from there.

"But look. That atmosphere where people look down on others without a second thought! Before I knew it, a trend had been created that treated those who were bad at sports or disliked them as dark and introverted! Because of that, there must be many who have felt like they didn't belong. I realized this one day and decided to become Unspokaiser to sound the alarm to the people of this town who took this for granted! In fact, shortly after I began my activities as Unspokaiser, people with the same aspirations gathered like this."

He looked over at the tied-up members of the Unspo Group.

"That fact itself is proof that these people felt like they didn't belong! It’s nothing other than proof that a twisted atmosphere looking down on those bad at sports has taken root! I wanted everyone to realize that! Because if a sound spirit does not dwell in a sound body, you cannot be called a true sportsman!"

He emphasized his point by changing his lines to sound similar to what he said as Unspo kaiser. Of course, now that I had already caught a glimpse of his true feelings, it was a bit late for him to be saying such things.

"Was that it!"

However, at that speech, the Scorp’s eyes filled with tears.

"I never noticed such a deep meaning behind it! Dammit...! I feel like the scales have fallen from my eyes! Mr. Fizel is Mr. Fizel after all!"

...Hey, didn't you guys refuse to even listen when this guy was saying the exact same thing as Unspo kaiser?

Looking around, the other security staff members also seemed to take Fizel's words at face value, as they were also tearing up. Whatever. Or rather, in the end, you guys just can't change your bias toward someone who can do sports, can you?

However, my inner thoughts were never going to reach the heavens. Scolb wiped his tears.

"I get it, Mr. Fizel! Unspo Kaiser disappeared today! From now on, all of us will work together to change the atmosphere of this town! Right, everyone!"

"Yeah!"

"Of course!"

"I'll help too!"

Watching everyone speak up, Fizel was moved to tears, nodding deeply over and over.

"Scolb..... everyone..... you understand me..... I'm so happy....."

He was muttering things like that.

Beside that grand finale, I stood alone, feeling incredibly left behind. From the bottom of my heart, I didn't care about any of it, so I just kept thinking that I wanted them to hurry up and pay me my reward. Forever and ever.

(True Identity Revealed: Unspo kaiser - Finished)

The Proof of Evil

He clearly wanted to say something, but for some reason, he wouldn't open his mouth.

"I won't tell you not to hesitate, but can you do that when you're alone?"

The wick of the lamp made a burnt sound, and the orange light flickered slightly. It was that kind of atmosphere.

However, the color of distress etched on his face probably wasn't just because of the lighting. I couldn't wait any longer. After a brief silence of hesitation...

"Miss Lina—"

"uhm..."

Maclyle finally opened his mouth.

"I am so... truly... sorry."

But then, he hesitated again and closed his mouth.

He was a black-haired man of about twenty, who gave the impression of being slender—to put it nicely—or weak-looking, to put it bluntly. He wore a black robe and a black cloak.

As his attire suggested, he was a mage belonging to the Mage Guild here in the town of Fallad.

While traveling aimlessly, I happened to visit the Mage Guild here and ended up accepting a request to exterminate some zombies that had appeared near the town. With Mr. Maclyle as my guide, I had smashed those problematic zombies this evening.

"Miss Lina, I have something to talk to you about."

Whispered to by Maclyle during dinner, he and I were now sitting face-to-face in the room of the inn I had taken.
He spoke with a lack of confidence.

"It's a ridiculous story, so I was thinking about how to say it... But you're right... there's no point in hesitating. I don't know if I can say it well, but... Miss Lina—"

He took a deep breath—and exhaled it along with his words.

"Miss Lina, what do you think of Miss Naga?"

".....Huh.....?"

I could clearly feel my cheek twitching. There are many strange creatures in this world. This "Naga the White Serpent" he just mentioned was one such animal.

Always wearing strange outfits. Forgetting the goal for the sake of the means. Spreading a troublesome atmosphere throughout the human world.

Interrupting my thoughts, Maclyle spoke sullenly.

"Actually, I—"

She called herself my rival, appearing randomly at times and doing nothing but complicating the situation. Even during the zombie hunt this time, she had appeared out of nowhere and made the situation a total mess. I imagined she was probably sleeping soundly in another room of the same inn by now.

But as for what I thought of Naga—that was...

Wait. A bad premonition ran down my spine for an instant.

In the past, there had been a truly strange guy who said he had fallen for Naga.

Could it be—Maclyle too?

".....U-uh, well, that is....."

With my cheek still twitching, I managed to squeeze out the words.

"Does that mean... you like Naga—?"

"Please stop with the tasteless jokes. I am asking you seriously."

...Good. Thank goodness.

It seemed my horrifying imagination had missed the mark. He had an utterly serious expression.

"What I am asking is, what do you think of her from a biological standpoint?"

"From a biological standpoint... well, I do think she's not human."

"I knew it!"

At my murmur, Maclyle’s face lit up as if he had found an ally.

"The outfit, the behavior, the thinking patterns, and that abnormal sturdiness! I also thought she wasn't a normal human!"

"I mean, no matter how you look at it, she isn't human, right?"

I expected him to get even more excited by my agreement—but instead...

"I see... so you think so too, Miss Lina..."

He spoke heavily with a sunken expression, then turned a serious gaze toward me.

"Actually, regarding that, I have formed a hypothesis."

"A hypothesis?"

When I asked back, he hesitated for just a moment before saying:

"Miss Naga's true identity is—"

"—Right—"

So her "uselessness" had been fully conveyed to Maclyle even after just one day of working together.

"Oh! You think so too?"

Finding someone who shared my thoughts, my voice naturally became lively.

"No, actually, my rotten luck with Naga has been going on for a long time. She has no common sense or decency, and just when you think she's fainted over something stupid, she gets hit with attack magic and recovers instantly."

"A Pure Demon—she is a Pure Demon, isn't she?"

I caught my breath slightly.

When people think of demons, Lesser Demons are famous, but these are far higher and more powerful existences. It's an absurd existence where all physical attacks are completely useless, and even some attack spells are neutralized.

He continued.

"I have never met a Pure Demon directly, but in legends, I hear there are Pure Demons who take on a form exactly like a human!"

"If it truly is a Mark of Demonic Nature, then we must find definitive proof to confirm that Naga is a Pure Demon! I absolutely need your cooperation, Lina! Of course, I'll pay you well for your trouble—"

"THAT'S IT!"

I let out the breath I was holding and screamed, leaping off the bed. "If that's the case, everything finally makes sense!"

"Right? Right?!"

"Alright, it's a deal!" I gave him an immediate answer without a second thought. I had always wondered just what kind of creature Naga was while I let her antics slide, but now the mystery might finally be solved. There was no reason not to jump on this!

"So, what do I need to do?"

"First," Macklyle—or rather, Mr. Macklyle—stood up from his chair across the small table, answering my enthusiastic question with calm, clever precision. "We start with behavioral observation."

"You mean there are still zombies left?!" Naga raised her voice the next morning as we sat around the breakfast table. She echoed Macklyle's news, her long black hair swaying. Clad in her usual black mantle, spiked shoulder guards, a skull necklace, and

that needlessly revealing outfit, she looked the same as ever. But if a Pure Demon was taking human form, it made sense that their sense of fashion would be fatally weird.

"Yes," Macklyle said, taking a sip of his tea. "The Association contacted me early this morning. When they went to confirm the site after my report yesterday, they apparently found more zombies."

"Hmm. I thought we wiped them all out," I muttered, frowning as I bit into my hot sandwich.

"What do you mean by that now?!" Naga snapped. "You said yesterday ‘that should have been all of them!’"

"Well, that’s true, but..." Macklyle looked troubled as Naga grilled him. "The Association says they won't pay the commission fee unless every last one is defeated."

"Won't pay?!" Naga’s voice grew harsh. She slammed her fork into her lemongrass-sautéed chicken.

"Calm down, Naga," I said coolly, poking at my vegetable hamburger. I looked at Macklyle. "I see their point, but they sent us in without knowing the exact numbers. That’s a failure in their investigation."

"Well... that is..."

"And since you, our chaperone, said that should be all of them, that's also a blunder on your side."

Macklyle groaned and shrunk back at my words.

"So, I have a proposal. We'll finish the job, but you have to pay for our future expenses and an additional fee for the extra work."

"A-Additional fee...?"

"Talk to your superiors. The reward can wait until everything is done. But look, if we get annoyed and walk away, you'll have to deal with the remaining zombies yourselves. And as the witness, that responsibility falls on you."

"I... I understand. I'll see what I can do..." Macklyle nodded reluctantly.

Once we got that answer, I turned to Naga. "How’s that sound?"

She tossed her hair back with a satisfied look. "Hmph. If that’s the case, I suppose I can accompany you."

Yes! She fell for it! I gloated inwardly.

Of course, the bit about more zombies was a total lie. We had wiped them out, and the reward had already been issued. But we couldn't conduct our 'investigation' if we just handed Naga her money and let her wander off. Macklyle and I had coordinated this yesterday; the extra fee was actually coming out of his own pocket. He was quite the actor; he really looked distressed.

Either way, preparations were complete. Naga resumed eating in a better mood, unaware as Macklyle and I briefly exchanged glances.

A cold, dry wind whistled through the branches of the withered trees. It was time to start the investigation.

To be honest, I already knew a bit about Naga’s nature. She was greedy for coins and food, and for some reason, she was popular with jellyfish. We reached the site of yesterday’s battle—a landscape of rolling hills dotted with craters and the charred remains of zombies.

"I don't see any," Naga grumbled, looking around.

"They're either hiding or wandering nearby. We'll just have to scout the area. Mr. Macklyle, how many did the Association say were left?"

"I heard there were three confirmed," he answered smoothly.

I began to think. If we could find proof that Naga was a Pure Demon, we could just replace the subject 'Naga' with 'Pure Demon' for research. Though, I’d have to distinguish between general demon traits and Naga's... unique personality.

Wait a minute, I thought. Demons are beings that spread ruin to the living. It was strange for one to be popular with jellyfish. Does that mean the Deep Sea Dolphin, one of the Five Dark Lords, is actually a jellyfish?

Just as that divine inspiration made me shiver, Naga pointed through the trees.

"Lina! Look!"

A shadow stumbled out from behind a withered tree.

"IT'S ACTUALLY THERE?!"

Macklyle and I shouted in unison, completely shocked.

"Why are you so surprised...?" Naga directed a suspicious look at us.

"Uh, well, it just popped out so suddenly, we weren't mentally prepared!" I waved my hands frantically.

"Yes! I hadn't seen it with my own eyes yet, so I was half-doubting there really was a zombie!" Macklyle added.

We piled on the excuses, but Naga's piercing gaze remained skeptical. *Damn you, zombie! Read the room!* Macklyle and I were using masterfully crafted lies to keep her here, and then a real one shows up! If two more appear, the job is officially over. I didn't even want to kill this thing! *Run away, zombie! Run faster than the wind!*

"Elmekia Lance!"

While I was praying in my head, Naga casually chanted a spell. The bolt of light struck the zombie, taking it down with ease.

"HOW COULD YOU KILL THE ZOMBIE?!" I wailed.

"Wait... Lina? Why are you crying over a zombie?"

"I'm not crying! I just got dust in my eye!"

"Lina, aren't you acting a bit strange?"

"I don't want to hear that from you!" I snapped, wiping my eyes.

I exchanged a silent look with Macklyle. No words were needed. We had to prove Naga was a demon as fast as possible. If there were no more zombies, fine—but if another appeared, we had to hide it.

Macklyle gave me a strained smile. "Ha... haha. Lina, just because Naga took the spotlight doesn't mean you have to be so depressed."

Naga actually seemed to buy that pathetic cover story. "Hmph. I see. If that's the case, you really are small-minded, Lina Inverse! Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho!"

She let out a boastful laugh, her needlessly large chest heaving. It was irritating, but suddenly, I had another epiphany.

Demons feed on negative human emotions. Pure Demons are spiritual beings who can take whatever form they like. *Could it be that Naga's chest is that big specifically to trigger an inferiority complex in me—someone with a more 'modest' average size—just so she can consume my negative energy?!*

If that was the case, I didn't need to feel frustrated at all! Furthermore, her erratic behavior that constantly bothered everyone made sense if her goal was to generate negative emotions.

The mystery was solved! In my mind, it was now an unshakable fact that Naga was a demon. However, my conviction wasn't enough; this was for Macklyle's research, and "Lina is sure of it" isn't exactly scientific evidence.

I glared at Naga, but then I snorted. It wasn't because of her. It was because, far behind her, a second zombie was wobbling out from the shadows.

Seriously?! Another one appeared?!

Macklyle saw it too, his face twitching. Naga noticed our reactions.

"What's wrong?" She started to turn around. "Wait—"

But right before she saw it, Macklyle grabbed a rock the size of a head and threw it with the speed of lightning. CRACK! It hit Naga square in the back of the head, knocking her unconscious for a split second!

"Nice follow-up, Macklyle!" I gave him a thumbs up and sprinted forward, chanting. "Blast Ash!"

With one strike of black magic, the zombie was reduced to dust. Perfect! Now the second zombie never existed. Just as I sighed in relief, Naga sat up abruptly.

"HEY! What was that for?! That hurt!" She stomped over to Macklyle.

"uhm, you see, a scrub typhus mite was aiming for you, so I acted instinctively—"

Naga paused and let out a small breath. "Hmph. If it was a scrub typhus mite, I suppose it can't be helped. I was going to be furious if you said it was just a mosquito."

Just how big of a threat is a scrub typhus mite to her?! But she was convinced.

"Now, Lina. Why did you snort earlier?"

"Oh, that? I just choked on some air."

She narrowed her eyes. "...Suspicious. Are you hiding something?"

Why was she being suspicious *now*? Was it the mite? Was the mite the turning point? Given her personality, making more excuses was a bad move. I put on an exasperated face.

"Yeah, yeah. Stop talking nonsense and let's find the zombies. Once we kill two more, we're done. You don't want to wander around this place all day, do you?"

"Hmph. True enough."

She accepted it easily. Success. We had moved past it.

I continued the 'investigation,' praying with every fiber of my being that no more zombies would show up.

The orange light of the lamp flickered low, making a sputtering sound as the wick burned down. I wondered if it was just the light, or if the lines of agony etched onto Maclyle's face were actually getting deeper.

It was night, in a room at the inn. A piece of parchment lay on the small table between Maclyle and me. On it, I had jotted down the traits of a "Pure Demon" that we had glimpsed from Naga's behavior throughout the day.

"For example—look here," I said.

- *Pure Demons get angry if you hit them in the back of the head with a stone.*
- *Pure Demons are weak against scrub typhus mites. Mosquitoes are fine.*
- *Pure Demons get lost the moment you take your eyes off them.*
- *Pure Demons get depressed when a fisherman they've inconvenienced gives them a lecture with a straight face. Etc, etc...*

A hesitant silence hung in the air for a moment. Then, Maclyle spoke up, looking somewhat dejected.

"Why is this? She... doesn't feel very much like a Pure Demon."

"Don't let her fool you!" I snapped back instantly. "The fact that a Pure Demon has taken a form identical to a human means she doesn't want us to realize her true identity!"

"No, I understand that, but..." Maclyle pointed to a line on the parchment. "With this description, she just sounds like a flighty person with no sense of direction and zero self-awareness."

"Aha! 'She vanishes the moment you take your eyes off her.' This suggests the possibility that she is teleporting through space when we aren't looking!"

As I delivered this insight into the truth, Maclyle's face lit up.

"And here. It says she 'gets depressed when lectured at.' They say demons feed on negative human emotions. If the fisherman had been furious and screaming, it would have fueled a demon's power. But he lectured her with a straight face. Moreover," I continued, "it wasn't just a complaint; it was a *lecture*. In other words, it came from a place of kindness—wanting Naga to become a decent person! Kindness! The polar opposite of negative emotion! It's not at all impossible that a Pure Demon would take damage from that and get depressed!"

"Ooooooooooh!"

My explanation was so persuasive it was practically leaking off the page and flooding the room. The mist of doubt clearing from Maclyle's face was like a sunrise.

"I see! If we interpret it that way, it's actually circumstantial evidence that Naga-san *is* a Pure Demon! What about the part about being weak to mites?"

"A wonderful observation, Lina-san! Thank you! My eyes were nearly deceived, but you opened them just in time—"

"I mean, it's not that big a deal. Confirming Naga's true identity is good for me, too. But—" I let go of my hands and my expression clouded. "After today, it's clear. We can't just wait around for her to slip up. We find plenty of circumstantial evidence, sure, but nothing's definitive. It can all be explained away by her just being a... 'strange person.' At this rate, Maclyle-san will run out of funds and have to scrap the investigation before Naga ever shows her tail."

"In other words, we need to take proactive steps to verify if she is a Pure Demon. But is there a way...?"

Maclyle groaned in thought for a while, then suddenly snapped his head up.

"I've got it! Pure Demons are supposed to be immune to offensive magic using the four elements. So, Lina-san, if you blast Naga-san with a Fireball or something...!"

"Don't be ridiculous!" I shouted. "If she's acting to pass as human, she'd likely just fake being dead even if the attack shouldn't work. If she's fine, then she's a Pure Demon for sure!"

"Faking death might work for a living person because of their pulse or breath, but a Pure Demon wouldn't have those to begin with. If a demon faked being dead, you probably couldn't tell them apart from a real corpse. And then a tug-of-war for the body would start. But more importantly—"

Maclyle groaned at my point.

"Even if there's only a one-in-a-million chance that Naga *is* human, we'd end up killing an innocent person!"

Even as I said "innocent," I felt a massive internal snag at the phrasing, but I brushed it aside.

"That will be fine!" Maclyle nodded strongly at my concern. "Since you'll be the one doing it, Lina-san, it won't be 'us'—it'll be *you*!"

"That doesn't make it fine for *me*!"

In my experience, clients who accept a refusal based on "I don't want to get in trouble" are practically nonexistent. Therefore, I tried a different angle of persuasion.

"Besides, think about it. When that stone hit Naga's head, she stopped moving for a bit. If you kill her, that's the end. No more research, no more investigation."

"Mm... that would certainly be a problem... Then how on earth—"

Maclyle and I sat there with our arms crossed, groaning in unison. It was quite a while before he looked up again.

"—Wait. Perhaps... this method might work."

The next morning, in the dining room on the first floor of the inn.

"Good morning, Naga! What a bright and refreshing morning!"

At my greeting, delivered with a full-beam smile, Naga's expression stiffened slightly. She was already at the table—

"......What is it, Lina...?"

"What do you mean 'what is it'? *Ufufu*, don't be silly, Naga. I'm just my usual self."

I sat down in an empty chair with a light skip in my step. Naga had started breakfast without waiting for me. Spread across the table was a "light" breakfast of potato salad, bacon and eggs, minestrone, corned beef salad, sandwiches, and hot dogs.

Usually, whether I got to the table first or she did, a battle for the food would break out. Anticipating this, Naga hurriedly pulled as many plates as she could toward herself.

In response, I raised my right hand.

"Excuse me! I'd like to order! Bacon salad, mushroom spaghetti, salted grilled trout, and the roast beef. Oh, and some juice too."

I placed my hands on my knees and waited with a friendly smile. Naga gave me a suspicious look.

".....What are you planning, Lina...?"

"Planning? What do you mean?"

I tilted my head and asked back, and the beads of sweat on Naga's forehead grew even larger.

At that moment!

"Ah. Good morning."

The person stepping through the front door was, of course, Maclyle. He walked over, sat in an empty chair, and smiled brilliantly.

"The sound of little birds woke me this morning. What a wonderful day, isn't it? Naga-san, Lina-san."

I nodded, still smiling, while Naga's face contorted further.

"Yes. It really is."

"And for me," Maclyle added cheerfully, "I'll have the fruit cake and orange juice."

"Coming right up."

The inn lady came over and set out my knife, fork, and spoon. Some time passed. As more time ticked by, Naga's forehead became drenched in sweat, and her complexion grew paler and paler.

Yes! It seems to be working!

Out of Naga's line of sight, Maclyle and I exchanged secret thumbs-ups.

"Oh, Naga. You've been like this for a while now," I said.

"Haha. That's right. I'll be paying for this as an expense," Maclyle added.

I didn't move an inch. Naga gave a small shiver, but I remained perfectly pleasant. Then, the lady returned and placed my ordered dishes on the table.

In a flash!

Faster than a bolt of lightning, Naga's left fork flicked out, skewering two slices of the roast beef I had ordered and snatching them away!

Just as I was about to yell and jump out of my seat, Maclyle cleared his throat. *Ahem.*

That brought me back to my senses. While soothing the throbbing vein in my temple, I forced a strained smile.

"Honestly, Naga. If you wanted more, you should have just ordered it."

The reason our behavior was so unusual was none other than Maclyle's plan.

Demons feed on negative human emotions. Conversely, shouldn't they be weak against *positive* emotions like kindness, joy, and happiness? Just like how Naga got depressed when the fisherman lectured her yesterday.

Therefore! If we treated a suspected Pure Demon with constant smiles, extreme kindness, and total generosity, would that not deal damage to them? We would blast Naga with a torrent of kindness to force her to show her tail!

The "Kindness Project."

That was the plan Maclyle proposed last night. For it to succeed, I obviously had to be kind to Naga. I couldn't lose my temper over a mere two slices of roast beef.

...Heh heh heh... Just you wait, Naga! You're going to vomit blood and writhe in agony under the full force of Lina Inverse's genuine kindness!

My aura, burning with "kindness," felt like it was scorching the very air.

The plan seemed to be working. From breakfast until we reached the site where the zombies were appearing, Maclyle and I maintained our two-pronged assault of kindness.

I cut her food into bite-sized pieces; when a carriage passed, I shielded her from the dust; I worried about the grass scratching her legs if she stepped off the path; and every hundred steps, I asked if she was tired. Under this rapid-fire hell of kindness, Naga's face showed blatant signs of exhaustion. At this rate, we were just one step away.

"Now then. I suppose we should look for zombies again today." I looked around. "Hmm, but it's silly to wander around and keep missing them. How about this? I'll go search around, and Naga, you stay here and wait. Of course, feel free to just rest if nothing happens."

I gave her a beaming smile. This was one of the seventy-two "Deadly Kindness Techniques": *'I'll do your share of the work for you.'*

At this declaration of attack, Naga finally staggered and leaned against a nearby tree trunk.

It's working! It's really working!

Naga didn't look at my smiling face. She kept her head down and spoke in a thin, dark voice.

".....I've heard a story once..."

She slowly raised her head, casting a suspicious gaze at Maclyle and me.

".....A prisoner's meals suddenly become luxurious one day. But that is also a declaration that their execution will be carried out that very day!"

"Wait... Naga-san?" Maclyle stammered.

"This kindness since this morning... that's what this is, isn't it?!"

"No! That's not it!" Maclyle and I waved our hands frantically.

However, Naga took a stance, her eyes like those of a cornered beast.

"I won't be fooled, Lina Inverse! You, being kind to someone? I knew I couldn't ignore such an unnatural, abnormal situation!"

This is bad!

When things get like this, it's obvious what Naga thinks: *Strike before you're struck*. She was bound to attack us! But if I fought back, the Kindness Project would be over. There was no way to talk sense into her when she was like this.

Wait. Maybe there was.

I put my hands on my hips, let out a loud, performative sigh, and looked back and forth between them.

".....Listen, Naga. Since you seem to trust me so much, let me ask you this. Do you really think *I* would be kind to someone I was planning to knock sideways later?"

"But then, why have you been so strangely helpful since this morning? It's *you*. I can't believe there isn't some ulterior motive."

In response to Naga's suspicion, the only thing I could do was play dumb. I just hoped she'd fall for it.

Naga tilted her head, looked off into the distance, and thought about various things for a while. Eventually...

".....Hmph. Ohoho. O-hohohoho! I see! I've got it! I finally understand!"

She slowly straightened her back, puffed out her chest, and began to laugh. Her eyes regained their light of confidence in an instant, and the tired look from before vanished completely.

"Naga-san...? Did you figure something out?"

At Maclyle's anxious question, Naga blinked, thought for a second, and then pointed a finger straight at me.

"Lina Inverse! I've been with you for a fair amount of time now, but until today, I never felt a shred of respect from you toward me, the Great Naga the White Serpent!"

Well, obviously. There isn't a shred of it. ...Wait, 'until today'? Past tense?

"However!" Naga continued as I furrowed my brows. "It seems you've finally come to understand my nobility! Whether you're conscious of it or not, your adoration leaked out into your behavior toward me, resulting in that creepy meddling! Ohohoho!"

Huh. So that's how it is.

Tuning out Naga's delusions, I semi-consciously reached down and picked up a fist-sized stone from the ground.

"I see! So that's what it was, Lina-san!"

At the sound of Maclyle's panicked voice, I suddenly snapped back to my senses.

...Hah! No, no, no. I almost did *something* with that rock I picked up while I was spacey. Bad, bad. Stay on plan. I tossed the rock aside and spoke.

"Hmm... honestly, I'm not really conscious of it... but I wonder if that's how it is..."

"It must be! There's no other explanation, after all."

The idea that I was "devoted" to Naga—even as a joke—made me feel sick to my stomach. However, for the sake of the plan, it was more convenient to let Naga reach her own conclusions. I managed to suppress the dark urge rising from the depths of my soul, plastered on a cheerful smile, and murdered a part of my own heart as I started walking.

At first, the plan seemed to be going smoothly, but it soon became extremely difficult. It was fine that Naga had convinced herself of my devotion, but thanks to that...

"By the way, Lina—"

We had finished lunch in town, and Naga was sitting on a cushion she'd bought. She called out to me as I returned to report.

"I wouldn't mind letting you massage these shoulders of mine, you know?"

Twitch. I could clearly feel my temple throbbing. Even if I didn't say it aloud, getting angry would only provide nourishment for a monster. I had to endure. I had to perform an "act of kindness" toward Naga.

I forced a wry smile. "I guess I have no choice. Fine. I'll do it, so take off your shoulder guards. But why are your shoulders so stiff anyway?"

As I spoke, I moved behind the seated Naga. She followed my instructions, removing her armor.

"Oh ho? Don't you know, Lina Inverse? When you have a certain amount of volume in your chest, that alone makes your shoulders quite stiff."

Twitch-twitch. I moved behind her "happily" and placed my hands on her shoulders.

"Ah... well, I knew that, but..."

"Hmph. Well, asking *you* to actually experience that for yourself would be an impossible request."

"W-well, anyway, like I said before, I'm going to go look for the zombies. You two wait here."

But if I got angry even internally, it would hinder the plan. I pawned off the task of looking after Naga to Mr. Maclyle and spun around. Naga's voice followed my retreating back.

"Hmph. Do your best searching. Just don't forget to come back and report every now and then. You should feel honored to be able to work for my sake. Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho!"

...Setting aside whether the opponent was a person of noble character, this was Naga, who had completely misunderstood the situation and grown incredibly arrogant.

How difficult this was—no, it was nearly impossible. It went without saying.

"Overjoyed," and with my vision blurring, I placed my hands on Naga's neck... no, her shoulders, and applied pressure. I felt like I was losing my grip on many things, but for now, I endured. Hang in there, me.

This was just until Naga revealed her true identity as a pure monster... As I thought that, a sudden realization flashed through my mind.

Namely: *If Naga isn't a pure monster, then that time is never going to come, right?*

...Before my confused eyes, Naga was still rambling on boastfully about her chest. What should I do in a case like this...? When I thought about it, I found the answer quite easily. Even if it wasn't "kindness," the point was that I just needed to hold a "positive emotion." Like joy.

"—Hey Lina, are you listening? Your hands have stopped moving. You seem to be mumbling something—"

As Naga turned around saying something or other, I opened my mouth and spun my words with joy from the bottom of my heart.

"Fireball!"

K-booooom!

Hit by a point-blank blast, Naga was blown away without a prayer! Following up on that—

"Fireball! Fireball! Fireball! Ahahahaha! Fireball!"

The barrage of attack spells drowned out Naga's screams. Of course, I was intentionally missing direct hits so she wouldn't die.

"Waaaaah!? Lina-san, calm down!"

The roar echoed! Crimson lotuses burst! A panicked Mr. Maclyle raised his voice in shock, but I gave him a thumbs-up.

"I'm having so much fun right now! Fun means joy! A positive emotion!"

"That joy... I feel like it's clearly not a positive emotion... More importantly, I have something to talk to you about, so please listen!"

He spoke with a very serious face.

"Talk?"

I reluctantly stopped my attack. In the corner of my eye, I saw Naga's figure fluttering and plopping onto the ground.

"Huh?"

Mr. Maclyle said with a solemn expression, "I'm wondering how to put this, but... to be blunt, Naga-san really isn't a pure monster, is she?"

My brain stopped for a second. What was he bringing up *now*? As I stood there dazed, he continued matter-of-factly.

"I judged that once Lina-san started 'worshipping' Naga-san, Naga-san clearly became arrogant. But if she were a pure monster, she would hate being the recipient of an emotion like 'being worshipped as a human.' It might be different if you were worshipping her as a monster, though."

"Which means, unfortunately, it seems she cannot be a pure monster."

"Eh? Wait? That's just a camouflage to hide her true identity!"

I started to rush.

"No, I've thought it was a bit strange since yesterday, but since you were insisting so enthusiastically, Lina-san, I just..."

"So it's my fault!?"

Well, certainly, I might have lost my cool a little bit because I was so focused on the idea that I was about to find out Naga's true identity.

"You're the one who started saying it in the first place!"

"Didn't you immediately agree that it must be so, Lina-san!?"

A mud-slinging match was about to begin, but then—

".....Heh... heh... heh... heh....."

A low, muffled laugh echoed, freezing both Mr. Maclyle and me. In the corner of my vision, Naga rose, looking like a tattered rag thanks to my spells!

What on earth was going on? I kept my eyes from twitching and let my brain run at full speed. Was there some excuse that could patch this up—there was! With a brilliant flash of inspiration, I turned a smile toward Naga.

"A scrub mite was aiming for you, Naga, so I acted instinctively—"

"AS IF AN EXCUSE LIKE THAT WOULD WORK!!!"

The roar of attack spells echoed across the winter-withered field.

Lesson: Preconceived notions narrow your perspective. Everyone should be careful. In many ways.

(The Proof of Evil: Finished)

The Labyrinth of Clutter

Boom! After the resonance of the explosion faded, not even a fragment of the opponent remained.

What I, the sorceress, had been commissioned for by the Sorcerers' Guild in this town of Keleen was the extermination of a chimera wandering near the town. Naturally, as a beautiful genius sorceress, Lina Inverse, a chimera was no match for me.

In the forest on the outskirts of town, I luckily ran into it without much searching and ended it immediately with a single attack spell! That should have been the end of it. But at that moment!

"Heh heh heh. As expected of the rumored Lina Inverse. Quite impressive."

I turned toward the muffled laughter to see a single shadow standing there.

The man standing there was Elias Mordred, who had been appointed by the Keleen Sorcerers' Guild—specifically, the average sorcerers there—to accompany me! He was the type of person you often find in any organization, looking down on others. Of course, I had no intention of reacting to that every single time, but—

"First, let me say you've passed!"

"...Passed...?"

I frowned involuntarily upon hearing a word I felt I shouldn't ignore.

"Exactly!"

Elias threw his arms out wide, spreading his cloak. "This chimera extermination was nothing more than a test, so to speak, to see your true ability!"

He paused there. Of course, he was waiting for my shocked reaction: "Wh-why!?" But if I went along with it here, I'd lose.

I waved my hand dismissively and said in a cool tone, "Yeah, yeah. Enough of that. Anyway, the job's done now."

The moment I said that, Elias's expression twitched.

...For a while, he looked around aimlessly in a panic, then he spoke in a voice even louder and more trembling than before.

"It was nothing more than a test!"

He pushed it again.

"Right, I'm heading back to the guild to get my fee."

When I tried to ignore him further, he began to shake.

".....Not just a test—!"

His eyes were teary and his voice was cracking. Wow, this guy has a glass heart. I didn't want to deal with him, but I had a strong feeling that if I just left him, he'd repeat the same line forever. How annoying.

"...Fine, what is this 'test'?"

The moment I asked, I scratched the back of my head and sighed, and Elias's expression brightened like the morning sun! Like withered grass regaining its vigor after getting water, he straightened his back.

"Do you want to know?"

"If you want to know, I shall tell you!"

I held back the urge to say "not really" and kept quiet.

"Actually, we, the Keleen Sorcerers' Guild, are currently facing a certain problem! One sorcerer on a specific mission has gone missing, and furthermore, four others sent to investigate also failed to return!"

"Wait...? That's a huge deal!"

I couldn't help but raise my voice. I thought I was going to hear some boring nonsense, but—five sorcerers missing?

"Therefore, we are in trouble!" He said, for some reason, in a triumphant tone. "It is certain that something happened! Investigation is obviously necessary, but a third disaster is also expected! Therefore, we need someone skilled... and that is when Lina Inverse arrived! You appeared, but there were those who questioned if your skill was truly as the rumors said. So, just to be safe, I had you tested!"

"I see... so the chimera extermination was just a convenient way to test me."

In short, for the sake of testing my strength, they procured a chimera of appropriate power from a sorcerer researching them and asked me to exterminate it under the guise of an "incident." It made sense why I ran into a chimera as soon as I entered the forest.

I shrugged my shoulders slightly. "...Well, fine. Anyway, I'm definitely taking the fee for this part. Now, about that missing person case—for now, why don't you tell me the details? Like how much the reward is, or what that mission the first guy disappeared on was—"

"Very well. I shall tell you."

He nodded gravely and spoke, his voice piercing the blowing wind.

"The mission where the trouble occurred was—The Keleen Sorcerers' Guild Year-End General Cleaning!"

I was silent for a moment, thinking about where to even start nitpicking, but I decided to go in order.

".....New Year's has already passed, hasn't it?"

"Do not misunderstand! The first incident occurred during the time of the year-end general cleaning. That is how it is."

Snap.

"Also, about the missing persons from the spring cleaning...?" I asked.

"It will be faster if I show you the site. Follow me," Elias said. Without waiting for my reply, he turned on his heel and began to walk away.

The Mages' Guild building in the town of Hashi stood with a small mountain looming behind it. As we drew close enough to see the structure, Elias finally spoke.

"You see that mountain behind the Guild?"

"I see it, but—"

"That," he said for a split second, "is our Mages' Guild warehouse."

I fell silent, unable to grasp the meaning of his words. "...The mountain... is a warehouse?"

When I muttered that in confusion, Elias nodded proudly. "My great-grandfather was a local dignitary. He even served as the Council Chairman of the Mages' Guild. Long ago, he donated that warehouse to the Guild. He built a massive warehouse, covered it with soil for temperature control, and planted trees. Now, it looks like nothing more than a small mountain."

"...Well, that's certainly something..."

"Try to keep it down, if possible," Elias warned. "Anyway, for now, I ask that you do not break anything inside."

"But wait, isn't there something in here? Like a manticore or something?" I asked.

He had mentioned a collapse earlier, suggesting someone might have been buried under fallen luggage, but then he added, "No, that's not it. I heard a roar of some kind. I told you that, didn't I?"

"Fine, then let's just go," I said, prompting him with my gaze. Elias, however, was breaking out in a greasy sweat.

"...Ugh..."

"You've got to be kidding... are you telling *me* to go first?" I asked.

Even so, Elias began to stall. "Wouldn't it be faster to have someone who knows the interior lead the way?"

"I suppose that makes sense... but before that, there is something I must tell you."

We continued. There were far too many blind spots. At this rate, if someone were lying collapsed in the shadows, finding them would be difficult.

"We'll just have to have them come to us, right?" I said, and without waiting for a reply, I started walking toward the Guild's entrance.

I had been shown a floor plan of the warehouse before entering, but it was proving useless here.

"Uhm wait, if something is there and a fight breaks out, I'll only be a hindrance..."

The interior of the warehouse was filled with a thick darkness.

"...If there weren't people involved, I'd just fire off a Dragon Slave and blow the whole mountain away," I muttered.

"What was that?"

"Nothing."

Because it was covered in soil, the temperature inside was higher than the winter air outside. But...

"I heard you," I said.

"Actually, my stomach has been tingling for a bit—"

Various scents mingled together; it smelled of old dust and nothing else.

"D-don't be reckless! When people are scared, the sound of the wind can sound like a woman crying, or they can mistake the sound of falling luggage for something else! Isn't that possible?"

"Enough. Stop making excuses like a child and let's go. This warehouse is a mountain of magical tools! Do you have any idea how much loss that would cause—!"

I didn't say out loud that he seemed particularly cowardly, of course.

"This is... how should I put it... a disaster," I whispered.

But he shook his head quietly. "No. Whether you're joking or not, Elias, who held a rod lit with magical light, was flustered. But... the scale is just too large, or maybe it's just a waste of space..."

"This warehouse, consisting of two levels and numerous rooms, has been a favorite of the Kayleane Mages' Guild for generations. No matter how vast a warehouse is, space is never infinite. It has been about eighty years since its completion. The discarded items have piled up over the years, nearly filling the vast space. And finally, last year! We realized! Perhaps we should clean up the items in the warehouse!"

"Too slow! You're way too slow to notice!"

Eighty years to notice? That goes beyond being a bit forgetful. But he didn't even listen to my retort, continuing in an ecstatic tone.

"And as the person in charge of cleaning this warehouse, I, Elias Mordred, was plucked from obscurity because of my lineage!"

"Plucked," huh? Was that it?

"I shall achieve brilliant results with this great mission of warehouse cleaning and climb to even greater heights!"

—But—

"What kind of 'brilliant results' do you get from cleaning a warehouse...?"

Then, Elias's expression darkened. "On the day I entered the warehouse with two companions to begin the cleaning—the incident occurred. In the middle of our work, a mysterious roar and vibration suddenly erupted from the depths of the warehouse. Sensing danger, we escaped, but in the end, one of us never emerged..."

He sent his gaze toward the distant sky as if remembering that moment.

"So, in short, you got scared, abandoned your comrade, and ran away?" I summarized.

"How rude! I did not abandon him! I merely respected the autonomy of his individual actions!"

"That's exactly what 'abandoning' means!"

"Let us set aside the difference in perspective for now. That is not the important part."

It was a blatant evasion of responsibility, but there was no point in pursuing it here.

"...Anyway, one person never came back, right?"

As I urged the story forward, he nodded pompously. "Indeed. It has been eighty years since construction. No one has any idea what is placed where or how much of it there is. It wouldn't be strange if there were half-finished chimeras or stone golems that haven't been given orders lurking somewhere."

"It's possible they started moving during the cleanup. So, as the person in charge, I organized an investigation team... but that team didn't come back either—"

"—Wait just a minute."

He spoke with a tragic look in his eyes, but I gave him a cold stare.

"They didn't come back, but you didn't go with them?"

When I asked, he replied with a resolute attitude.

"I have absolutely no desire to go to dangerous places myself!"

"You just said it outright!"

Certainly, most people don't *want* to go to dangerous places, and being so honest about those true feelings is almost admirable in a way... but hearing him say it made me want to tease him a little.

"Well, if you want me to take on the investigation, you're coming with me."

"Eh?"

"Yep."

At my words, Elias's body gave a violent jerk, and he spoke in a cracked voice.

"Accompaniment? Me?"

"Besides, I don't know the faces of the people who disappeared, and I've never been in the warehouse. You've been inside, so you know a bit about the interior and what the

people I’m looking for look like. So, let’s go together. Should we talk details with the Council Chairman later? Like the amount of the reward."

"It's fine. I'll handle it," I said.

"Don't you want to achieve results and move up in the world? There’s a difference in evaluation between 'hired a traveling mage to solve it' and 'solved it by going along despite the danger.'"

"B-b-but even if it's not me..." He was dripping with greasy sweat, trying to find a way out, but I had no intention of letting him watch from the sidelines.

"As the person hired for the investigation, I’ve decided your accompaniment is optimal. If you’re saying you’re *scared*, then I guess I have to turn down the job."

"I-I am not scared! My knees just won't stop shaking and I can't stop sweating!"

The air was lukewarm. Perhaps because so many things were placed haphazardly, various scents lingered in the air. At the tip of the rod held in his right hand, the magical light illuminated the area around the warehouse entrance. I looked around and let out a sigh.

Wooden crates, grimoires, old furniture. Large glass bottles containing cloudy liquids.

"Fine, let's go."

Various things were piled up haphazardly, reaching nearly to the ceiling in some places, blocking the view.

"Is it always like this?" I asked.

"Levitation... he probably used floating magic or something to stack these..."

To the trembling man, I flashed a broad smile. "Then there's no problem at all."

Thanks to the clutter, the interior was a magnificent labyrinth. Among the miscellaneous items, the warehouse floor peeped through like narrow back alleys.

I prattled on. "I know. It was just a joke."

I said that and shrugged my shoulders.

"But no matter how precious they are, what’s the point of tools that are just kept in a warehouse with no plans for use? I feel like it wouldn't matter if I swiped a few things from around here and sold them off."

"But one day, they might see the light of day. Eventually, we need to examine their value and organize them."

"I'm not doing it out of malice, I'm disposing of them out of kindness."

"There it is."

"True, I also have times when patterns on the wall look like human faces and I can't go to the bathroom alone at night."

"But that was definitely some kind of roar."

Regardless of whether I believed his words, it was better to be careful.

"Fine, I’ll keep that in mind. Then, shall we go?"

"Head toward where you think the first person disappeared."

"Ugh... Understood. But if something comes out, I'm counting on you! For real! Seriously!"

"Leave it to me."

At my reply, he reluctantly started walking—then turned back to me.

"No shouting from behind to scare me!"

"I'm not gonna do that! Jeez... just how much of a coward are you...?"

"I am not scared! My heart just won't stop pounding!"

"That's no different. That's not love. —Probably."

He groaned a little in dissatisfaction and began to move with heavy steps. I followed behind him, chanting a spell under my breath.

"Lighting!"

I cast magical lights onto a pillar here and a wooden crate there. As the two of us proceeded, a path of light began to form in the warehouse. Doing this illuminated the surroundings and marked the way back. If the people lost in the warehouse were safe, it would serve as a landmark for them. If there was an enemy, it would act as a lure.

"By the way... I don't exactly know the precise location where the first person vanished. Besides, even though I've been inside, I only wandered around this area. Don't expect a proper guide."

Elias's voice trembled slightly as he spoke while walking with a hunched posture. Most likely, it wasn't a conversation necessary for the search, but idle chatter to hide his inner fear. While casting magical lights here and there, I said:

"Calm down."

"But it's much better than having never been inside at all, right?"

"Stairs!"

"I remember a ghost story my grandma told me once...!"

"The one who does the hitting feels a bit better!"

Because of the haphazardly placed items, this place was a more complicated maze than a poorly designed ruin.

"E-e-e-eek!"

He wasn't even listening to my words anymore. Was that a groan or a voice of protest?

"Listen, if you don't seriously decide to get rid of a lot of this stuff, nothing is going to get done."

"We view that as a problem as well, which is why this time—"

ROOOOAR.

At that moment, a sound echoed through the warehouse, cutting Elias off! A sound—no, it certainly sounded like a roar.

Elias’s body jerked. "S-s-s-see! I told you!"

His shaking grew more violent as he turned toward me with teary eyes. "It’s here! Something is here! Let's go home right now! Let’s go back!"

"Calm down. It sounded like a cry, but—"

"It *is* a cry! Something is here! This is bad! Let's go home! Right now!" He shouted, nearly grabbing onto me.

"That's why I said, calm—"

"There's no time to be calm! If we take our time, we'll be attacked! My calluses on my feet are—"

This was bad. If he panicked here, things would get messy. It couldn't be helped. I clenched my fist.

"Special Move! I told you to calm down! Drill Screw Punch!"

Goryu! Dorigushi! Gori!

"Gubfuuuuuu!"

The blow I drove into Elias’s solar plexus sent damage to his internal organs and brought him hellish pain!

I quietly looked down at Elias, who was writhing on the floor, unable even to scream. "How's that? Calm now?"

When I asked, he managed to gasp out between breaths while struggling, "Y-you hit me—"

He probably wanted to complain about being hit, but of course, I wasn't accepting complaints. Still looking down at him, I said:

"The one who’s hit might feel pain, but..."

"That twisty blow to the gut was for your sake, to make you calm down! In a pinch, the most dangerous thing is losing your cool like you just did. I struck you to teach you that to the very marrow of your bones!"

When I said that, he replied while still twitching, "...Was... was that really it?"

"Anyway," I said, though he sounded doubtful for some reason. I looked toward the deep darkness—toward where the cry had come from.

"From here on, it's my territory. I'll go check things out for a bit, so you wait here for a while. Oh, but just because you're alone, don't you dare leave me and go home."

"D-don't worry about that..."

Elias gave me a thumbs-up while still lying on the floor. "Even if you didn't say it... I don't think I'll be able to stand for a while..."

"Good!"

".....It's not good....."

"Levitation!"

"Well, I'm off!"

Ignoring his dissatisfied mutterings, I chanted the spell. With the Levitation spell, I floated up near the ceiling of the warehouse. This made it much easier to move than weaving through the gaps in the luggage.

However, just because I was high up didn't mean I could see the whole warehouse. After crossing this large room, there should be a hallway at the end with several small rooms. And at the very end of the hallway, there should be stairs leading to the second floor.

For now, I aimed for that hallway—and controlled the spell, coming to a dead stop in mid-air.

Just now. I heard something.

If I strained my ears, I heard a rhythmic, dry *clack, clack* sound. Is that... footsteps?

"Lighting!"

The luggage, piled up nearly to the ceiling like towers or mountains, created deep shadows. Even if these piles weren't here, it would be impossible to illuminate every

corner of this vast warehouse with a single magical light. It was difficult to find the source of that voice or whatever it was.

If that was the case, I'd just let the opponent find me. If I moved through the air like this, holding a light to stand out, they would surely make a move.

Staying in the air, I chanted a spell—and threw a magical light forward into the air. The light traveled straight through the void, hit the warehouse wall, and stuck to it, pushing back the surrounding darkness.

Beneath the illuminated wall, a square opening of darkness appeared—the entrance to the hallway leading deeper inside.

From that dark entrance... *clack, clack*... the footsteps drew closer. Eventually, as I waited.

From the depths of that rectangular darkness, a stained white began to ooze forth. At first, I couldn't tell what it was. It stood nearly twice the height of a person, appearing as a haphazard collection of yellowed, white objects. Only when it stepped into the light and I caught sight of its distorted limbs did I finally realize its true nature.

A Bone Golem.

Usually, an "Iron Golem" or "Stone Golem" is a construct given a temporary soul through magical arts. This Bone Golem, however, used the remains of living creatures instead of stone. Its primary characteristic? It looked incredibly creepy. Whether it noticed us or not, the golem came to a halt under the light and turned its face-like region toward me.

Elmekia Lance!

"Luminous Flash Spear!"

CRASH! RUMBLE! CLATTER!

With just one spell from me, the Bone Golem collapsed on the spot into a mountain of countless bones without being able to do a single thing! I wasn't the kind of softhearted person who would stand around silently waiting for an opponent to make the first move. From the moment I heard those approaching footsteps, I had already begun chanting my attack spell.

The lingering echoes of the collapsing bones vibrated through the emptiness of the warehouse and then faded. I strained my ears, but I heard nothing else.

"---What was that sound just now?"

I saw a smile playing on his lips, but my expression remained stern. "I hate to rain on your parade, but this isn't over yet. We need to examine the remains for clues."

Our job wasn't just golem hunting; it was search and rescue, right?

"Ah... r-right, I suppose you're correct. Still, this is a huge step forward. Perhaps everyone was just hiding in fear of that golem. HEY—!"

He cupped his hands around his mouth and raised his voice.

"HIGGINS! LASETTI! ILPORTO! It's me! Mordred! It's okay now... I think!"

I managed to keep my magic under control and headed back the way we came. It seemed Arias had recovered from the damage of my earlier "punch"; he had stood up and called out to me.

I landed beside him. "There was a Bone Golem! I took care of it for now!"

"I... I see!"

"To finish off a Bone Golem so effortlessly... you really are as capable as I thought!"

"Anyway, let's keep moving."

As we started walking, Arias's pace was considerably lighter than before. He probably thought we had reached a turning point now that the golem was defeated. I didn't share his optimism.

I kicked one of the bones scattered on the floor. "It's completely stopped moving. Someone was quite eccentric to build this thing, though I don't know who."

"Eccentric? The one who built this?"

When I asked him that, not quite understanding his meaning, he gave a small nod.

"Yeah. From what I've heard, it's easier and less troublesome to build Bone Golems using large bones. But looking at these, there aren't many large ones used here."

If the golem had attacked the five missing people, they would have fled or resisted. In that case, the piled-up cargo would be knocked over, and there would be signs of a struggle. However, at least within my sight, there were no such traces. That meant there was a high possibility something else was going on.

"Ryan! Gravefort! It's safe now, so come out if you're hiding!"

"Could it be... they've already been done in by the golem..."

His voice was tinged with anxiety, but I remained calm. "It's too early to jump to conclusions. They might be unconscious, or barricaded in a room where they can't hear us."

We called out the names of the missing people and waited, but there was no response.

"Hm---" Elias groaned and stopped walking when we reached the spot where the wreckage of the Bone Golem I defeated lay.

I realized it then. Looking closely, I couldn't tell exactly what kind of bones they were, but they all belonged to small or medium-sized creatures.

"Perhaps it was built experimentally to gather data. Someone built it, stored it here, and then it went on a rampage," Elias concluded.

If I told him what I was thinking now, he'd probably start getting scared for no reason. So, I decided to keep quiet for the moment and move on.

"Maybe. But let's leave the guesswork for later and find everyone first."

"Yeah. You're right. HEY! EVERYONE!! ARE YOU OKAY!!"

We pushed through the pile of bones and continued, but despite our shouts, there was still no answer. Just like before, I lit magical lights here and there as we entered the hallway. Various items were piled up along the walls, significantly narrowing the path. After walking a short distance, we came across a set of large double doors on both sides. Seeing them, I paused and whispered.

".....Why are they halfway open.....?"

Both the doors on the left and right of the hallway were left ajar, almost as if they were inviting us in.

"Hmph. You know nothing," Elias said with a somewhat triumphant tone. "In a place with this much stuff, it's a daily occurrence that doors can't be opened fully because of the luggage! Someone left them halfway open while making just enough space for a person to pass! That's just how messy places are!"

"Don't give me that! Anyway, let's check inside."

"Understood. I don't know how things are around here either, so I'll leave the front to you. I'll call out to the others from behind."

First, I released a magical light through the gap into the room. What it illuminated was a room even more packed with objects than the last one. Because of that, visibility was poor.

"Is anyone there—!" Elias shouted from behind me, but again, there was no reply.

I had no choice but to step into the room. At that moment! Multiple small footsteps approached from the back of the room! Before long, they emerged into the light—

"---Wh-What is that!" Elias let out a high-pitched yelp behind me.

Leaping over the piled-up cargo and charging toward us were the bones of small animals—the size of dogs and cats!

Was this another Bone Golem? But one of these wouldn't be a problem! Just as I was about to chant a spell, I saw another skeletal beast rushing in from the corner of my eye!

And another one from a different direction!

Good grief, how many are there? This was getting a bit bad! If they swarmed us with numbers, I wouldn't be able to handle them all alone!

"We're getting out of here!" With that declaration, I pushed Elias out behind me.

"U-Understood!" He certainly had no objections to running away. As soon as we hit the hallway, we bolted back the way we came.

As I ran, I muttered the Levitation spell under my breath. I didn't know how many there were, but if we reached a wide-open area, I could escape into the air where their attacks couldn't reach. With that thought, I glanced back—

"Guegh!?"

I grabbed Elias by the back of his collar just as he was half a step ahead of me. As he stopped, choking, I shouted at his back, "Wait a second!"

"Say something before you use physical force to stop me!" He turned over his shoulder, protesting with a desperate look on his face.

I spoke calmly. "If I just told you to stop with words, you would have kept running, wouldn't you?"

"---"

"Besides, look. They aren't chasing us."

He stared blankly, finally noticing that the skeletal beasts weren't coming out into the hallway.

".....Ah....."

I turned on my heel and walked back toward the room we had just fled.

"H-Hey---"

Ignoring Elias's anxious murmurs, I kept my distance and peered through the gap. There, illuminated by the magical light, were two skeletal beasts standing perfectly still. They showed no sign of reacting to me.

"They won't leave the room. They've probably been ordered to attack anyone who enters."

"I see. So that's it."

I gave him an exasperated look as he nodded convincingly. "No. It's not 'just like that.' Don't you think it's strange?"

"What is? Golems follow the orders of the caster who made them, but they lack flexibility."

"Exactly. That means there's someone who ordered those animal bones to 'guard this room,' right?"

Eliass finally realized the truth and groaned.

"If there were only one, there’s a slight chance it went on a rampage by accident... but since there are several, we have to assume they were properly ordered. In other words, this isn't an accident. Someone planned this."

"No way...! But... why..."

Beside a confused, muttering Elias, I thought for a moment. "---I want to ask. What was the name of the first person who went missing?"

"Higgins. Michael Higgins."

"Then, did this Higgins happen to do research on golems or something?"

"Wait. You don't mean.....?"

"He certainly did..."

"It's probably exactly what I mean!" I nodded, then raised my voice toward the dark depths of the warehouse where there was no light.

"Since multiple Bone Golems are working in sync, an accident is impossible! It's certain that a mage capable of creating golems is involved! An outsider is unlikely! And if the second person or anyone after that was the culprit, it wouldn't explain why *you* disappeared first! In other words, there's no possibility other than you being the culprit!

You were probably appointed by Elias to enter this warehouse and thought of embezzling the supplies! Since there’s so much stuff here, you thought a little wouldn't be missed! So you gathered bone specimens or whatever you found in the warehouse, created Bone Golems, and caused a commotion! While everyone was busy dealing with the chaos, you planned to scout for valuable items and sneak them out—"

"FOOLISH!"

A single shout cut off my voice and echoed through the warehouse.

"That voice..... Higgins!" Elias cried out in shock.

Deep, deep down the hallway, within a distant glow where a magical light had been born, a single shadow began to ooze forth.

"I know not who you are..... but I shall commend you for seeing through my handiwork."

The shadow approached slowly. Anger colored his voice.

"However! To be accused of something as utterly moronic as embezzlement... I cannot stand by and listen in silence!"

Not for embezzlement?

As I furrowed my brows, Elias raised his voice to ask in my stead. "Then why, Higgins! Why did you do this!"

"Mordred..... you, of all people, should understand....."

The figure approaching finally became clear. He was a red-haired man about the same age as Elias, wearing the typical mage outfit: a black mantle over black robes.

"I was opposed to cleaning up this warehouse from the very beginning! Because—!"

Higgins spread both hands wide in the light and made a grand declaration!

"Isn't it actually more relaxing when things are cluttered?! Cleaning it up is simply unthinkable! Besides, organizing is a pain!"

"Ugh.....! Now that you mention it, that's certainly true, but—"

As Arias wavered, Higgins continued.

"I've been here many times before to drop things off! And I realized it! This place is surprisingly comfortable! It's warm in winter and cool in summer! Perhaps because of the warehouse's scale, there are even toilets and water stations installed in the back! On a previous visit, I even discovered barrels of wine left here! I often found myself

coming here seeking peace! To make it even more comfortable, I brought in a massive amount of preserved food!"

"To drink, eat, and lounge around here! That is truly paradise! My ideal!! And then came the talk of the Great Warehouse Cleanup! It was a plan to snatch my paradise away from me! Therefore! I took advantage of being appointed as the first cleaning staff member and faked my disappearance due to an 'accident'! Then, to threaten and drive away any new searchers, I built golems from the specimen bones I found and stationed them!"

"Th-Then, what about the four who went to investigate later—?"

At Elias's question, Higgins broke into a smile. "Do not worry. They agreed with my lofty ideals and are currently in the back, drinking, eating, and lounging around. Mordred..... if you don't return from here, the search efforts should cease for a while..... I don't think it's a bad deal, you know?"

"How about it? Do you not wish to enjoy this paradise of the soul with us?"

Asked this, Elias fell into deep thought for a moment, his throat clicking as he swallowed hard.

"Wh... what should we do, Lina-san.....?"

The moment I was told that idiotic motive, my heart snapped, and I had been crouching on the spot ever since. Higgins called out to me. Of course, I only had one answer.

"What do you mean, 'What should we do?!'" I screamed as I sprang to his feet. "What kind of reason is that?! 'It’s more relaxing when it’s messy'?! Are all of you useless people?! Clean it up! Clean it up right now!"

I knew they existed—people who claimed they felt more relaxed when things were cluttered! But I didn’t think there were this many people with such a severe case! Was the Mages' Association here just a gathering of losers?!

Higgins met my soul-wrenching scream with a cold sneer—and it looked like even Elias was about to be swayed by the atmosphere.

"It seems the young lady over there cannot understand our ideals. I suppose it’s because she’s a woman."

"This has nothing to do with gender!"

I turned on my heel as I yelled, sprinting back toward the first large room while chanting a spell. I slammed my hand against the stone floor!

"Vu-Vraimer!"

It was a Golem Creation spell! In response to my call, the warehouse floor surged and rose, forming a stone giant with a physique similar to the Bone Golem from earlier.

"Golem!" I immediately commanded the creature. I pointed toward the warehouse entrance where the path of light led. "Everything around here—push it all out that door! I don't care if you break the door down in the process!"

Obeying the command, the Golem immediately began grabbing nearby objects with its rugged hands. Naturally, there was no such thing as "care"; old wooden boxes were crushed, but I didn't give a damn!

"Wa... Wait! You, what are you doing?!" A panicked Higgins rushed up from behind to stop me, but—

"'What am I doing?!' My foot!"

Gack! "Hyugh!"

My flying kick landed as a perfect counter, flattening Higgins. Even then, my temper hadn't cooled. I turned to the fallen Higgins and snapped.

"You put important things away properly! You throw away things you don't need! It's your own fault for not being able to do that!"

With that, I turned on my heel again and began chanting a spell to create "Work Golem Number Two."

Because of the "drastic treatment" provided by the golems, many of the items pushed outside were damaged to some degree, and the Council Chairman of the Mages' Association expressed his regrets to me. However, after hearing the reason why Higgins and the others had barricaded themselves—or rather, "secluded"

themselves—he expressed even deeper regret and decided not to press charges for the damages.

By the time the sun set behind the western mountains, there was nothing left inside the Mages' Association warehouse. Higgins and the four others who had been dragged out realized their paradise was lost and were sobbing in front of the mountain of trash. They were annoying. Stop crying. You useless people.

Granted, the pile of stuff that looked like nothing but garbage was stacked so high in front of the warehouse that it partially buried the Association building. I gazed up at the mountain of trash towering against the night sky and renewed my resolve: you really shouldn't let things pile up; you've got to clean as you go.

Elias watched me and muttered nostalgically. "...Now that I think about it, when I was a kid... I used to leave my room messy, and my mom threw away all my toys..."

(The Labyrinth of Clutter: Finished)

(Note: This story is fiction. It has absolutely nothing to do with the author's room or state of mind.)

The Season of Stickyness

Behind the well-used wooden counter, the innkeeper girl spoke with a beaming smile.

"One night, then. It might be a little sticky, do you mind?"

"Sticky?" I muttered, knitting my brows after thinking for a moment.

"Yes." Her answer was immediate. A full-on smile. I stared at her intently. She looked a little older than me. She had shoulder-length blonde hair, dark clothes, and a simple apron. But no matter how long I stared, no further explanation was offered.

"...Uh... I'd prefer a room that isn't sticky."

When I asked, she kept that beaming smile and said, as if explaining to a child, "Guest, that is impossible."

"It's impossible?!" Eh? It felt like *I* was the one making an unreasonable demand!

This happened in the middle of a destinationless journey. I had reached a small village in a mountain valley just as dusk approached.

And this was what happened when I found an inn and asked for a room. Well now, what was I supposed to do? As I was thinking, she tilted her head slightly.

"Could it be, guest... that you actually dislike things being sticky?"

"I hate it! Of course I hate it! Is there another inn in this village?"

"There isn't, and even if there were, it would likely be sticky there too. Of course, it would be the same if you stayed at someone's house."

"...The whole village?"

For a split second, I seriously considered pushing on to the next town or village, but nightfall was pressing in. I didn't want to travel a dark mountain road with no moonlight, but at the same time, a room that "might be sticky" was just too much. What kind of room was it anyway?

"So... why exactly is the room sticky?" I asked, feeling exasperated.

"I cannot tell you," she replied instantly. "It might end up not being sticky at all, and in that case, I think it's better if you never knew."

It made less and less sense. I furrowed my brow.

"It might, it might not... what do you mean? Is it that the room maintenance is so bad that some people find it sticky?"

"The room maintenance is perfect!" The innkeeper girl looked slightly offended at my question. "The cleaning is flawless, and the bedsheets are freshly laundered. It is absolutely impossible for the room itself to be sticky."

"...Then why...?"

"I cannot answer."

"Come on, give me something—"

"It's impossible." There was no room for negotiation.

Of course, it's human nature to become more curious when told something like that. However, I didn't feel like continuing a back-and-forth of "Tell me," "No." I looked her straight in the eye with a serious gaze.

"It seems... there's some sort of circumstance here."

Her eyes wavered slightly at my point. Thinking about it calmly, I had just stated the obvious, but when people are hit where it hurts, they tend to get shaken up to some degree. I pressed the advantage immediately.

"As you can see, I'm a traveling mage. I'm not bragging, but I've solved all sorts of incidents in various places. So, I might be able to help with whatever's going on. But obviously, I can't do anything if I don't know the situation. If you're harboring some kind of trouble, you're free to choose: keep it a secret and solve it yourselves, or try consulting me on the off-chance it helps."

As I spoke and looked her straight in the eye, her pupils wavered greatly. *Alright*. She was definitely shaken. Of course, I hadn't actually said I *would* help. I could always just listen to the story and say, "Ah, sorry. I can't help with that."

The innkeeper girl looked conflicted for a while before she spoke with a determined expression.

"I'll consult my father—the village chief. Please wait a moment." She gave a small nod.

The sunlight leaking through the open window was already starting to fade.

We were sitting at a table in a corner of the small eatery on the first floor of the inn. There were three of us: me, the innkeeper girl, and an elderly man she had brought along. The middle-aged guy, who had a mustache and white hairs starting to mix into his black hair, opened his mouth.

"I am Radz Riot, the chief of this Mihai Village. This is my daughter, Selphy," he said, gesturing toward the innkeeper girl.

"I'm Lina. Lina Inverse."

When I introduced myself, the village chief gave a look that said, "Oh..."

I couldn't help but groan softly. The village chief, who had a serious look in his eyes, continued.

"I hear you are a traveling mage. If so, you must be knowledgeable, so I wish to consult you. Please keep this a secret from other villages and towns."

"Yeah. Of course."

The village chief nodded back at my confirmation. "Actually... about twenty years ago, it started happening every year during this season, when the mountain snow melts and the plants begin to bud. They began to appear in massive numbers in the village. Slimes..."

"Well... that certainly doesn't sound good."

To provide a brief explanation, slimes are slimy, jiggly creatures often found in dark, damp places. Even though we just call them "slimes," there are many different types. They range from the size of a fingertip to the size of a human. Some are harmless,

some are dangerous; their textures range from gooey to bouncy, and they have a wide variety of colors and properties.

In short, the true identity of the "stickiness" Selphy had mentioned was—

"Perhaps they are looking for a comfortable place, but even if we close the doors and windows, they often enter the rooms through gaps. Their movement is especially prominent during the night when there's no sun."

"I get the situation... but why are slimes popping up in the first place?"

"We don't have a clue either. And only in early spring," Selphy added as a supplementary explanation. "We know they come out of the cracked gaps in a rocky area in the nearby mountains, but beyond that... nothing. It's true they aren't the kind to cause direct harm to people, but they aren't pleasant to have around."

"I see."

"They don't always enter the rooms, but I couldn't say for sure that they *wouldn't*. I had no choice but to say it that way."

I see. With that, most of the mystery was solved. However, a question still remained.

"We tried filling the rocky area with earth and sand before, but they just pushed through it or came out from somewhere a little further away. Thanks to that, during this season, the village's manpower is taken up by slime extermination and we can't get any work done. We requested the Lord to help with the extermination several times, but he only replied that he couldn't move troops right away for something that only happens in early spring and doesn't harm people."

I gave a half-hearted nod. The Lord's response might seem cold, but it was actually quite reasonable. To begin with, soldiers' swords and spears are useless against slimes. It's better to use the soldiers for other duties. That said, for the village being left to fend for itself, it was unbearable.

I thought for a moment.

"First, it sounds like we need to investigate the cause... Do you want to leave that investigation to me? I can't guarantee a solution since we don't even know the cause yet... but I'll take a fixed amount per day as an investigation fee. If I find the cause or solve it, I'll get a separate success reward. How's that?"

"I would very much like to ask that of you."

He must have been truly troubled. The village chief agreed instantly. Considering the size of the village, I couldn't expect a huge reward, but the reason I offered to take on the investigation was simple: curiosity. I had never heard of slimes—not insects, but slimes—suddenly appearing just because it became spring. I wondered what kind of mechanism was at work.

And so, I began full-scale negotiations with the village chief regarding the request fee.

I woke up to the sound of small birds and threw the window wide open. Between the open window and the frame, something went *schlopp*, trailing a sticky thread.

"...Ugh..."

A refreshing morning, ruined. I hurriedly looked around the room, but fortunately, there were no signs that anything had entered. It seemed a slime had been crawling outside the window during the night.

When I took a sweeping look out the window, I saw the entire village out in the morning sun, clutching sticks and herding slimes together. The slimes that appeared in this village had a viscosity somewhere between "oozy" and "jiggly"—what you might call the "sticky-icky" type. Because of them, village mornings consisted of sticky threads trailing over here and trailing over there.

I downed the juice that had been brought to me in one gulp and stood up from my seat, setting the cup down. "Shall we head out then? Consider it a post-meal stroll."

Leaving the Namidame Inn and walking down the village street, I quickly understood the ordeal everyone was facing. The walls of the buildings were covered in sticky residue wherever a slime had crawled. Everyone was doing a massive cleanup, splashing water while looking like they were on the verge of tears.

Meanwhile, the massive quantities of slimes that had been gathered were being tossed one after another into large wooden boxes installed throughout the village.

"We close the lids at night, but basically we leave them like that and leave the rest to the slime collection contractors," Selphie explained.

"Slime collection contractors?" I furrowed my brow at the improbable term.

"Well, calling them 'contractors' is a bit much; the village pays some of the residents to do it. I've heard that to exterminate slimes, you have to burn them with fire or use chemicals, but with this many of them, that's just not feasible. So, we throw them in those boxes and leave them for a while."

Naturally, the sight was far from refreshing. ...*What a nasty scene*... I didn't know exactly how many slimes had come out, but it was no wonder the villagers were fed up.

I had closed my window for the time being, finished changing, and headed to the dining hall. When I arrived in the village yesterday, I had wondered why there were so many unusually small storage sheds. It never occurred to me that they weren't sheds, but slime containers.

"Everyone looks like they're having a rough time..."

"Yes. But this is something of a seasonal tradition for our village," Selphie said.

By the time I finished my morning meal, she explained the process: "If we leave the lids open during the day, the slimes lose their moisture and get lighter after a few days. That's when the contractors collect them. They dry them out further until the moisture is completely gone, and then burn them."

"I see!" I was impressed. It actually made a lot of sense.

If it were just one or two, you could take them out with fire or medicine, but against these numbers, you'd need a mage who could spam high-level fire spells or enough firewood to bankrupt the village.

"When shall we depart, Miss Lina?"

Selphie, who brought over my post-meal apple juice, had already changed into mobile clothes—trousers and a shirt—and was fully prepared to go. She was slated to accompany me on the investigation I was starting today. The Village Elder called her a "guide," but in reality, she was likely a watchdog to make sure I didn't slack off.

"Right. Well then..."

As we walked along the road, I asked, "But what do you do about those slimes?"

Selphie replied as if it were the most natural thing in the world: "They stay as they are."

"As they are?"

She nodded. "The top of the boxes are coated in oil so the slimes can't crawl out. Thinking about it, it makes sense. Most of a slime's body is water. It's not well known, but slimes are actually quite heavy. A round, jiggly slime about knee-high can easily weigh as much as five or six buckets of water."

In fact, when the villagers threw the slimes into the boxes, it took several people lifting them on door-sized boards.

"But still, 'slime collection contractor'..."

She gave a wry smile. "I suppose it sounds odd. But you know how children have those kinds of misunderstandings? When I was little, I was told 'The Great Capital where the King lives is far more amazing than this village in every way.' So I used to imagine that it must be much stickier than here. Not just in early spring, but all year round."

"I would hate a Royal Capital like that."

I winced, momentarily imagining a magnificent castle trailing threads and extravagant carriages running while pulling sticky goo behind them. "Burn a country like that to the ground."

"Now that I'm older, I've realized our village is the special one. People usually have an extreme dislike for getting sticky with slimes. I understand that now. I've been like this since I was born, so when I was little, I thought this was normal. But I was wrong. I guess this is what it means to 'climb the stairs to adulthood'."

No, the stairs to adulthood are different. I didn't know exactly how, but I knew for certain that wasn't it.

The area Selphie led me to was near the rocky mountains on the opposite side of the main road. The trees and grass grew here and there, but the exposed rock face was prominent. Before us stood a towering crag. From the cracks in the rock, thin, brownish slime was oozing out.

"It's around here."

It was unclear why they spawned in such massive numbers during this season. There was likely a hollow inside where they multiplied, eventually squeezing out through the cracks. They usually came out at night when there was no sunlight, but those slimes would lose moisture and become unable to move before reaching the village.

"The slimes strangely don't head toward the dry rocky areas. They must sense moisture near the village somehow."

"Hmm... that's the first I've heard of that."

If I could find the point of origin and do something about it, this phenomenon should stop. I let out a gulp, chanted a spell under my breath, and pressed my hand against the rock.

"Dug-Haut!"

The spell, which interfered with the earth spirits to dig a tunnel, carved a hole into the rock. Naturally, as a result—

Squelch, squelch, splat!

"Gyahhh!"

Even though I was mentally prepared, I couldn't help but scream as a massive amount of slime poured out all at once! Spells that affect rock and ground obviously don't affect slimes. Hence, this outcome.

"Fireball!"

Boom!

I blasted a high-output spell right into the slimes that had just emerged. The sphere of light exploded on impact, scattering high-temperature flames. A spell like this would incinerate that amount of slime instantly.

After confirming the slimes had stopped moving after being roasted by the crimson flames, I shouted to pump myself up. "Alright!"

I had expected this, but the visual was still physiologically unbearable. Meanwhile, Selphie, who had been used to slimes since childhood, merely frowned with a look of slight annoyance.

"Miss Lina, please don't do anything too reckless. I don't mind the stickiness, but there's a limit to how much slime the villagers can process in a day."

She doesn't mind the stickiness? ...Right, right, I get it. I calmed my heart and chanted a spell under my breath. I glared at the hole I'd opened in the rock. It was a size a person could just barely crawl through. It didn't look like I'd reached the target yet, but if I went inside and repeated the process, I should eventually get there.

Selphie looked at me with wide eyes. "Miss Lina—you don't seriously intend to go in there!?"

"To stop the slimes from coming out, I have to find the cause of the mass outbreak. To do that, the best way is to go to the source. And to get there, I have to trace it back from here... although..."

If I just went in, slime would ooze from the tunnel walls, and if I dug further, I'd get buried in a slime landslide again. Since I definitely didn't want that, I thought for a moment, chanted a spell, and slammed it into the tunnel I'd just opened.

"Freeze Brid!"

K-ching!

It was an ice spell, the polar opposite of a Fireball. The light bullet scattered intense cold as it shattered. Naturally, the moisture-rich slimes trying to ooze from the cracks froze solid.

However, seeing that, Selphie remarked, "...Now the tunnel is blocked by ice."

"I know that!"

The intense cold had even frozen the moisture in the air, partially blocking the path. I chanted yet another spell.

"Dill Brand!"

Cr-ack!

I used the breaking spell to shatter the ice.

"Are you going to keep doing this?" Selphie asked, her voice carrying a nuance of "this seems like a lot of work."

It was a bit irritating, but I also felt like this method wasn't great. Digging a tunnel through rock filled with slime while trying not to let the slime out was a difficult problem.

"Ugh... I'll try a few other things to see if there's a better way..."

I thought for a bit, chanted a different spell, and placed my hand on the rock face.

"Vu-Vrimer!"

The rock wall groaned in response to the spell. Before me and the recoiling Selphie, the supposedly immovable rock twisted and creaked, taking a specific shape. Shortly after, a large humanoid made of rock was born!

A Golem. This temporary life, created from earth and stone through sorcery, possessed power and durability far beyond any human.

"It's a bit more tedious than the digging spell, but there's a time lag until the Golem is complete. Even as the tunnel gets deeper, if I move toward the exit after casting, I won't get caught in a slime landslide immediately."

"...I see."

I commanded the rock giant, pointing to the ground beside me. "Golem! Come here and stand right there!"

At my command, the Golem creaked its ice-covered body, walked over, and stood tall where I pointed. It was nearly twice Selphie's height. She stared up at it, seemingly seeing a Golem for the first time.

"That's amazing... but what are you going to make it do?"

"What do you mean? It's already done its job." I walked up to the rock wall. There was now a large gouge where the rock had been. "When you make a Golem, the rock it's made from obviously disappears. If I keep making them in a line, I get a tunnel."

With Selphie's acknowledgment behind me, I chanted the same spell again. My tedious work began.

It was, of course, a pain. I'd create a Golem and make it stand outside. If slimes appeared, I'd freeze them and order a Golem to carry them out. Once the tunnel reached a decent depth, I stopped sending them out and ordered them to support the

ceiling to prevent cave-ins. It would be foolish to assume the rock was stable; it was riddled with cracks where slimes leaked out. There was no guarantee it wouldn't collapse.

If the slimes stopped oozing from the walls, it meant I was digging in the wrong direction, so I'd backtrack slightly and try again. As I moved forward, the natural light faded, so I needed light spells.

As a result of this labor, the tunnel continued into the depths like a gentle upward slope.

"But... it's really cold in here..." Selphie muttered, hugging her shoulders.

Because I was spamming ice spells to keep the slimes back, it was naturally freezing. If I hadn't been wearing my gloves while touching the rock face for the Golem spell, I would have had frostbite long ago.

"Well, it can't be helped. If I don't freeze the area, the slimes will ooze out and leave threads everywhere."

She shivered slightly. "Still... if it has to be this cold, I'd almost prefer the stickiness."

"No. Absolutely not." I shook my head vigorously.

"Huh? Usually, compared to being cold—"

"I told you, absolutely not."

Ugh... Selphie is terrifying. Even if she was used to it, choosing stickiness over cold was not an option...

"Leaving the stickiness aside, surely you wouldn't like being buried in slimes and suffocating to death, right?"

"Well, that would be... although if I'm just getting buried in stickiness, that's actually kind of okay."

It's "okay"?!

Maybe she wasn't just used to it; maybe she had some very strange hobbies. I shook my head to clear that scary thought and focused on the work in front of me. I chanted the spell and placed my hand on the wall at the end of the tunnel.

"Vu Vraimer!"

In that instant, I felt it. A sensation clearly different from everything before. I followed my instincts without hesitation.

"Run!"

Avoiding the season of "slimy stickiness," I turned on my heel and dashed toward the tunnel entrance the moment I called out "Flash Flood!" Since it was a thick, viscous substance, it didn't move quite as fast as a snow avalanche or a real wall of water, but the disgusting sound behind me was still closing in rapidly!

"Eh?" Selphie let out.

"Hurry!" I shouted.

I slipped past a momentarily bewildered Selphie.

"Y-Yes!" she followed a split second later, not quite understanding what was happening but running all the same. Putting every ounce of soul into the legs kicking the ground, I—leaped to the side the instant I cleared the tunnel!

At that exact moment, amidst the creaking of rocks being reborn into a Golem behind me, there came a squelching, gooey sound. The second I thought it was coming—*Bebujyu!* A physiologically repulsive sound echoed behind us! I didn't need to look back to know what had happened. The tunnel had been breached—either right at the slime spawning point or somewhere very close to it.

"Icicle Lance!"

Koki-i-i-n! Bluupupupu.

"Kyaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

There was no sign of a counterattack. The avalanche of slime that had burst out with that nasty sound caught Selphie, who had been slightly slow to escape, and overflowed everywhere. But for some reason, Selphie, why did your scream sound a little bit happy?

I directed my cold-spell directly at the slimes flowing toward me, freezing them solid to create an improvised ice levee. For a while, the slimes kept pouring out of the

tunnel, but even that couldn't last forever. It seemed the slimes that had been accumulating further ahead had all come rushing down at once as an avalanche!

After waiting a while, the momentum of the slime avalanche gradually weakened and eventually stopped. A sea of slime spread out around us. One corner of it bulged upward, trailing threads of goo, and as it approached me with a *nechori, nechori* sound, it spoke.

"Are you alright, Lina-san?"

"I'm fine, but... Selphie, you..."

"I'm fine. It's just a little sticky."

"A little" was an understatement. She was covered from head to toe in slime to the point where her original form was unrecognizable... well, if the person herself said she was fine, I decided to leave it be.

"......I see."

In response, she slithered off toward the village.

"Right then."

I created a Golem and gave it orders to push the slimes deeper inside back out. Left behind, I began chanting a spell for the time being.

"......So it had become like this... this place....."

Selphie’s voice echoed as she looked around and whispered. Past where the tunnel had broken through—illuminated by the magical light I had cast—was a natural cavern.

After that, I said, "Then Selphie, I have a favor. Go back for a moment and explain to the villagers what kind of work we're doing here. Also, tell them I might need a hand later. Once you’re back, go take a bath and change your clothes."

"I'm fine like this—"

"Change. Your. Clothes."

I barely managed to swallow the line, *Because looking at you is grossing me out,* but my intent must have gotten across. I used fire-type spells in rapid succession,

incinerating the overflowing slime. Once the slime being pushed out had mostly disappeared, I ordered the Golem to stop its work.

Around that time, Selphie returned in fresh clothes, and together we stepped into the space beyond the breached tunnel.

"Subterranean hollows happen sometimes... but one packed tight with slime is a first for me....." I muttered, holding up an improvised torch—a wooden stick found outside with a magical light cast on it—as we walked cautiously.

The cave was large enough for a person to pass through, though in some places we had to crouch. There were uneven, gentle slopes, and thanks to the slime's stickiness, the footing was the absolute worst. If I slipped and fell, I'd be sticky all over. Naturally, my pace had to be cautious.

Unlike the area where we had dug the tunnel earlier, there were no cracks in the walls. The slimes generated further ahead had been pushed toward the village through cracks in the rock face. Given the amount of slime that had come out earlier, I figured the cave wouldn't be that deep.

As expected, we hadn't gone far when...

"Lina-san, look over there!"

Where Selphie was pointing, at the end of the cave, there were clear signs of human handiwork. A wall that looked like it was made of brick. Part of the lower section had crumbled, leaving a hole where slime was still trying to spill out.

No mistake. The cause of the mass outbreak lay beyond this wall. I chanted a spell to freeze the wall and the slime together, then stepped back.

"Icicle Lance!"

"Damu Brass!"

Bam!

I shattered the frozen wall from above! ...I had prepared myself to freeze any slime that came out immediately, but if nothing came out, all the better. Approaching fearfully, I shone the light into the hole.

".....What is this?" I muttered, tilting my head. I reached in and pulled one out. It was flat, round, and looked a bit like a large plate. However, the color was a translucent sephia, like hardened caramel. It was something I had never seen before.

"——That’s——!"

Recognizing it, Selphie raised her voice.

"Do you know what this is, Selphie?"

"Of course. That is—" she nodded firmly and said clearly.

"Dried slime."

The person who turned around when called by Selphie-chan was a middle-aged man in his forties who looked like he could be found anywhere. He had short-cropped black hair and well-worn work clothes.
"Oh, Selphie-chan. ——Is this the person? The one helping you investigate the cause of the slime, I mean."

It was a corner of the village after noon. After finishing the investigation of the slime's origin and returning to the village, I had finished a slightly late lunch and asked Selphie to introduce me to the village's slime collector. This was the man. At the edge of the village, he was the old guy who had been sun-drying slimes that had lost their moisture and could no longer move.

I spoke to the man. "I've identified the cause of the outbreak."

"Really? That's amazing of you!" He sent me unreserved praise with a carefree smile.

"If you keep digging into the rock where the slimes come out using magic, there’s a natural cave further in," I explained.

"Heh. And then?" the man asked with great interest.

"There's a wall at the back, and beyond it were a warehouse and a laboratory. It seems like a long time ago, a mage built an underground lab using the natural cave. There was a cave-in that blocked the exit from the lab, and there were cracks all over the warehouse, so I think it's quite old."

"They seemed to be researching slimes. I found out from various documents left in the lab. It looks like they were trying to make something that could maintain cold for a

long time by utilizing their moisture-retaining properties. If the research had been completed, they might have made something that could keep meat or fish fresh for a long time."

"That sounds convenient."

"Quite. It's a shame it wasn't finished. Anyway, in the warehouse, there were mountains of dried slimes, probably for research use."

"……Dried……"

The smile vanished from the man's face. I continued regardless.

"According to the documents, they're a type with extremely strong vitality. Even if they look dried up, they apparently reactivate once they get moisture."

Normal slimes rot when you add water after they die, so I gathered that the mage had collected this specific type... but coming back to life when returned to water? What kind of vitality is that? Then again, considering there are creatures that split into two and keep living if cut, or those that laugh like idiots and instantly regenerate even after being hit by attack spells, maybe this wasn't all that surprising.

"This part is just my imagination, but since they revive in early spring, I think the key is the snowmelt. During winter, the snow piles up on the mountain, and in early spring it melts into water and soaks into the ground. When I checked with a flight spell, I found a hole leading to the back of the cave in the mountain."

The man's eyes were darting around, lost for words. I asked him:

"By any chance—did the groundwater flow change because of that just during this season, flowing into the warehouse? Then some of the slimes, supplied with moisture, revived. They went from the warehouse wall with the hole into the natural cave, and then through the cracks in the rock to the village. In fact, when I checked the warehouse, there was a spot where water was trickling in."

The man listened intently to my story. This next part was something I hadn't even told Selphie yet.

"The village chief said the mass outbreaks started about twenty years ago. Around that time, was there an earthquake or a landslide inside the cave? That's probably when the snowmelt started getting in."

"....."

"You didn't happen to... throw dried slimes into the back of that cave in the mountain instead of burning them, did you?"

Selphie let out a cry of shock. To Selphie’s voice, the man gave a small nod while keeping his head down.

".....No way..... Then..... Then it was me....."

"Was it really just as Lina-san said!!"

"About twenty years ago..... I took on the job of processing the slimes..... but when I actually tried it, just like green wood won't burn, I couldn't burn half-dried slimes....."

Even if the warehouse had been full of dried slimes, if a certain amount revived every year, the warehouse should have eventually become empty.

"It takes a large space and a long time to dry all the slimes completely... I dried and burned many of them properly, but the work couldn't keep up. For the time being, I often ended up stashing them in my house..... From early spring to near the start of autumn, my whole house would be overflowing with half-dry, motionless slimes, and my family would complain constantly....."

Well, yeah, the family certainly would complain about that.

"But I couldn't bring myself to say I was quitting the slime collection now..... In any case, it's something someone has to do... I searched around for a place to store the slimes and found a vertical shaft in the back of the mountain cave—and since then, I've been throwing the slimes I couldn't finish drying into that hole..... But..... I never thought..... it would turn into something like this....."

In short, even if it wasn't on purpose, he had been drying the slimes that revived due to snowmelt and then returning them to their original location. He said he had burned some, but this wouldn't decrease the slime stock at all.

"——No——"

Selphie spoke in a quiet tone, then turned her eyes toward me.

"Lina-san, this incident ends there: with the dried slimes stored in the warehouse by the ancient mage overflowing because of the snowmelt."

".....Eh.....?"

The man looked up. Selphie continued.

"We were certainly paying a fee from the village as thanks for the slime collection..... but based on what I just heard, it was by no means a wage that matched the trouble you went through. It seems the person himself had no idea this was happening. Besides, the point is, if we just carry out the dried slimes stuck in there and burn them, everything is solved, right? Then there's no need to force anyone to be the villain, is there?"

".....Selphie-chan....."

Whether from guilt or gratitude, tears glistened in the man's eyes. Seeing a grown man with teary eyes isn't exactly a beautiful sight.

Of course, I had no objection. I had spoken in this situation specifically because I intended to leave the judgment to Selphie.

"——Isn't that fine? If that's what Selphie thinks."

Saying that, I gave a small smile.

That evening.

A single strike of my attack spell incinerated the mountain of dried slimes!

"Fireball!"

Zudoon!

With the help of everyone in the village, we disposed of the hauled-out dried slimes—and with that, the mass slime outbreak incident was safely resolved.

Even including the success reward, my cash income wasn't very much, but I had obtained the materials left by the mage who researched slimes. If I went to the Mages' Guild and sold them well, it should fetch a decent amount.

The faces of the villagers watching the burning slimes reflected their various thoughts.

"——But——"

Among them, Selphie, who was standing next to the village chief staring at the flickering flames, said in a deeply moved tone:

"It's a little sad to think the village won't be sticky anymore when spring comes."

"NO IT'S NOT."

Everyone in the village, myself included, retorted in unison.

And they lived happily ever after.

This place—Mihai Village—would never be sticky again, even when spring arrived. As I watched the concentrated fire of the villagers, it was clear that they had decided to follow the parched village chief's lead.

Red, blue, and orange flames rose as the pile of dried slime in a corner of the village burned away. Various expressions flickered on the faces of the villagers watching the blaze.

It was then.

"———What is this!?"

A man's voice, bordering on a scream, rang out from behind the circle of villagers. Everyone turned around. Beyond them stood a man I didn't recognize. Judging by his age, he was probably a bit older than me. He had short black hair, wore a gray robe, and carried a stuffed knapsack on his back. Based on his outfit and aura, he looked like a mage.

"Foursu !?"

The one who called out with a bright, excited voice was Selphie, the daughter of the innkeeper where I was staying.

"Foursu, it's you!"

"Never mind that! What is the meaning of this!?"

The man called Foursu glared at the flickering flames and raised his voice.

"We're just processing the slimes," said an elderly man with a mustache—Lads, Selphie’s father and the village chief.

Foursu turned toward him. "I know that! But this amount of slime is clearly abnormal! Besides, they’re completely dried out! What happened?"

"Naturally, it turned out that way."

The village chief nodded, and Foursu looked at him as if he were staring at a monster.

"Wait, just a minute." Foursu looked around at the villagers. "The way you’re talking... don't tell me you guys don't understand at all!?"

With a tone of total denial, Foursu shouted in a voice halfway to tears. "Stickiness is the best thing about this village! Why would you get rid of that!? What are you going to do!?"

"Ah. You did used to say that," the village chief remarked.

"I did! I decided to become a mage because I wanted to make this village even better—to make it even stickier!"

He looked around at all the gathered villagers and spoke with fervent passion. "Everyone! What on earth happened!?"

"Well, about that—"

Selphie stepped forward and began to explain the sequence of events.

I happened to be there when the phenomenon of the village becoming a sticky mess every spring morning—where the residue left by slimes would sparkle in the morning sun on the trees, roads, and buildings, creating a fantastic beauty like a fairy tale—began to occur. I was tasked with investigating the cause of this phenomenon, and as a result, I managed to solve it.

Once Selphie finished her explanation, Foursu staggered backward, muttering.

"Then... you mean...? The village's seasonal tradition is going to disappear!? If you guys say you don't understand the greatness of stickiness, then fine!"

"One more thing," I added.

Foursu was indeed another person who loved stickiness. However, unfortunately, there aren't many slime-lovers in this world. The villagers' responses to his passionate speech were blunt.

"I don't really mind if it's gone." "It's not 'fantastic' at all." "To begin with, it's just not beautiful."

The group watched him go in a daze for a while—but then I noticed something.

"Wait a second," I let out as Foursu ' back completely disappeared. "Foursu , who became a mage just to make the village stickier... he ran toward the mountain in the back, not toward the main road, didn't he?"

"That's right. He said he was leaving the village in a huff..."

"If he's running to the back mountain, that means he didn't run away because he was sulking. It means his research on how to make the village sticky is already complete, and he's intending to go through with it right now, isn't he?"

"Now that you mention it, he did say he'd make the village better even if he had to do it alone..."

I lowered my voice, praying my prediction was wrong. "That 'making it better' likely means turning this village into a sea of slime on his own, right?"

...After a brief silence.

"STOP HIM!!!" the village chief shrieked.

"Roger!"

In response to the chief's scream, the village men shouted back and started running instantly. They chased after Foursu, who was already out of sight.

The chief looked at me, since I hadn't moved yet. "Lina, please help us! I'll pay you a reward, of course!"

"If that's the case, I have no complaints!" I gave a thumbs-up and an immediate answer. "Selphie! I need a guide!"

"Okay!"

"Selphie, please lead the way."

"...Understood."

At the chief's urging, she finally nodded.

"So, Selphie. Have you and Foursu been acquaintances since you were kids?"

As we made our way through the mountains, I questioned her. The rocky mountain behind the village was rugged, with trees and bushes growing everywhere. Neither the visibility nor the footing was good. The places where a person could actually walk were limited, and the villagers were splitting up to search. Selphie and I were at the back of the group, walking along a relatively gentle mountain path while we talked.

"Yes. We were childhood friends who lived nearby. To tell you the truth, I didn't have many friends when I was little... He might have been the one I played with most."

"Hmm... was he sickly or something?"

"No." Selphie, walking ahead of me, looked back over her shoulder for just a moment. "When we were kids, whenever the slimes came out in the spring, he would get pointlessly excited. He'd get covered in slime, hug the other kids who were playing, and get them all sticky too. Eventually, the number of kids who would play with him dropped one by one..."

"Well... that would happen..." I muttered gloomily.

I knew Selphie liked the stickiness of slimes, but was her excitement over them just like a child playing in the snow? No, that was completely incomprehensible. If a friend suddenly hit you with a snowball, you could laugh and throw one back. But if someone suddenly smeared slime on you, you'd probably just go home in silence, take a shower, and cry while hugging your knees. Naturally, you'd stop being friends.

"But Foursu was different. He always played with me."

"Oho." So, Foursu had feelings for Selphie?

"He said that when I covered him in slime for the first time, it felt like something inside him awakened."

He was different, all right. He was just a guy with a problematic fetish.

But regardless of whether it was a fetish or feelings for Selphie, there was something I had to confirm.

"So—what do you think of Foursu ?"

Based on her reaction, she didn't seem to have romantic feelings for him.

"You both like slimes, right? If Foursu says he’s going to cover the village in slime, wouldn't that actually be a good thing for you?"

"Of course it would!"

"Don't agree so instantly!"

She blinked at my retort. "Eh? But Lina, you're the one who brought it up."

"Well, yes, but! At least pretend to hesitate, even if it's a lie! That immediate 'yes' is just too much!"

I shouted with all my might, and she finally slumped her shoulders a little.

"I’ve had a vague feeling for a while that ordinary people—both the villagers and travelers—don't actually like slime stickiness that much."

"A 'vague' feeling, huh."

"As for my personal preference, I'd love to have the village covered in slime all year round—but I also understand that as long as everyone else hates it, turning the village sticky would only be a negative. Travelers would stop coming, and if that happened, our inn wouldn't be able to stay in business. Even if it's an inn my father runs half as a hobby."

She looked ahead. "And for the other villagers, it would take a lot of effort to remove the slimes, which would cut into the time they need for their actual work. Even if

stickiness is great, we can't just leave the slimes as they are. If Foursu covers the village in slime like he wants, the village's way of life might collapse. That’s why—I think we have to stop him."

"Then we're good."

I nodded. To be honest, I was worried that Selphie, the slime-lover, might betray us. I had deliberately chosen to walk and talk slowly just to confirm her feelings. If she could state her intent this clearly, we were fine.

"We’ll stop him. Before he causes a real mess."

"Yes!"

She looked me straight in the eye and nodded, and I gave a small nod back.

"I’ll use a spell to search from the sky. Hop on my back."

"Ah, okay!"

I chanted the spell, and once I felt Selphie cling to me from behind, I activated the completed Levitation.

With her on my back, my body floated gently into the air.

"Whoa! Waaaaah!"

The sound in my ear was half-scream and half-cheer; it was pretty noisy. Eventually, Selphie and I rose to a height slightly above the surrounding trees.

As the name suggested, it was a spell for floating idly in the air. The drawback was that it only moved about as fast as a brisk walk, but its strength was that it could lift quite heavy objects. Carrying one person was nothing.

The wind blowing through the mountains felt pleasant.

"Lina, you can do something like this too!?" Selphie’s voice was bouncy; this was clearly her first time experiencing something like this.

"Well, yeah. Now, Selphie, I want to ask: are there any water sources in the mountains? Like a lake or a river flowing through?"

"A water source?"

"Slimes need moisture or they'll lose their body water and dry up. I don't know how Foursu plans to cause a mass outbreak, but he'll almost certainly head for a water source. He'll use a place like that!"

Even though it was a rocky mountain, there were plenty of trees. With the terrain and the foliage in the way, it would be difficult to find him from the air. However, if I could guess his destination, that was a different story!

"Okay," I replied, but he was still nowhere to be found. My levitation spell wasn't particularly fast, but since I was floating, I could ignore the terrain and fly straight through areas that were impassable on foot. This meant I could potentially head him off! However, there was a chance we had simply passed each other somewhere. I explained this to Selphie, and we began retracing our original route.

"Understood! In that case, look a bit further to the left. You see that cedar tree that's taller than the others? Head for that!"

I controlled the spell and steered us in that direction. Before long, a small stream flowing through the trees came into view below.

"That one?" I asked.

"Yes. If we go a little upstream, there's a small spring."

Scanning the area, I saw no sign of Foursu. Trees grew thick around the stream, and their leaves obstructed my vision. By now, the rocky terrain had transitioned into a typical mountain forest. There was no doubt Foursu was aiming for this area.

"Okay. I'm going to hover around the river, so help me look for him."

With that, I lowered our altitude and floated along the water's surface toward the upstream. Eventually, just as Selphie had said, a small spring appeared.

"Is he there?" I asked.

"No..." she replied.

"I see."

I was just thinking about making another round trip when—*Rumble... rumble...* A sound like a distant earthquake made the air vibrate.

"Lina-san! Look at that!"

Even without Selphie pointing it out, my eyes had already locked onto the sight. It was on a mountain slope quite a distance from the water. Snagging on trees and rocks but continuing its slow descent down the incline was a jiggly, translucent mass the size of a house!

Don't tell me that's...

"It's a slime! Look!" Selphie's voice sounded strangely delighted for some reason.

Indeed. As it slid down the slope, it certainly looked like one giant slime.

But still... did such a massive slime even exist in this world? Well, it was right there in front of me, so there was no point in questioning it. Regardless, for something like that to appear out of thin air, there was only one possible cause.

"Selphie! I'm going ahead, so get off for a second!"

"Eh? Oh, okay!"

I found a spot nearby, cancelled the spell, and landed. Once she hopped off my back, I chanted a spell.

"Winds, gather! Raywing!"

Wrapped in a barrier of wind, I soared into the sky! It was the same type of flight magic, but the speed was on a completely different level. The downside was that it was difficult to control, and the sum of the weight, speed, and altitude was proportional to the caster's skill. In other words, with Selphie along, I'd be forced to crawl near the ground—which was useless here with all the trees and uneven terrain.

Alone, however, I could reach decent heights and speeds. I rose above the treeline and bolted straight toward the area where the giant slime had appeared! Soon, I spotted a robed figure standing still beneath the trees below.

Found him!

I briefly considered just ramming straight into him, but if I messed up the control, I'd hit a tree. I landed nearby, and the moment I deactivated the spell, I yelled at the top of my lungs!

"Foursu!"

Hearing his name, the culprit who had summoned the giant slime took a defensive stance.

"Tch! You again?!"

"You're faster than I thought! Though it looks like you were too late to stop the first one!"

"I spent a lot of time wondering how you planned to cover the village in slime," I said, looking at the giant slime oozing its way down the slope, "but I never expected you to *summon* something like that..."

Yes, Foursu had used summoning magic to produce the slime. It was a sorcerous art that interfered with space to call forth and enslave creatures from this world—or perhaps from a different world entirely.

Normally, I would have considered the possibility of him summoning slimes. But usually, a single summoning would only bring forth one, maybe a few, normal-sized slimes at best. To get enough to bury a village that way, he would have had to chant the spell dozens—no, hundreds of times. I had calculated that I could find and stop him long before he summoned a sufficient quantity.

But bringing out a monster *that* big was completely outside my calculations. A slime of this size wouldn't even need a water source to keep moving. Its speed was limited because it was sliding down an obstacle-filled slope, but if he summoned one or two more of those, their sheer weight would send them hurtling toward the village like an avalanche! I wasn't about to let that happen.

"Think this through! What you're doing isn't going to help the village! Just think! If something that heavy hits the village, it'll cause as much damage as a landslide!"

"Heh. I've thought of that. Once it goes down here—"

Fatality! The "Pretend to Persuade" Strike!!

I picked up a stone at my feet and muttered to him. The instant Foursu looked toward the slime's path, I threw it with everything I had. It's incredibly difficult for an indoor-type person to dodge a sneak attack like this! The stone flew straight for Foursu—

"—Whoa!?"

But at the very last second, he noticed the projectile, leaned back, and dodged it! *Tch! Lucky brat!*

However, I had already anticipated the possibility of him dodging. Even as I threw it, I had begun chanting a spell, and the moment I saw him miss, I dashed across the ground toward him!

"Ugh! Resorting to force in the end, are you!?"

Spitting out the insult, he immediately spun on his heel and bolted into the trees! *Damn it! It would have been much simpler if he'd underestimated me as a girl and tried to fight!*

Was he planning to lose me in the woods and summon Slime Number Two? I had no intention of playing tag in a forest with bad footing. Aiming at Foursu' retreating back, I released the spell I had prepared!

"Wind Bridle!"

Whoosh!

The spell conjured a fierce gale. If I had used fire or ice attack magic, the trees would have acted as shields, making it hard to aim—and if I missed, I'd just be creating obstacles for myself. But this spell was different! It was just a simple wind spell, but if you're hit from behind while running on rough terrain, a fall is inevitable!

Furthermore, because it was a wind spell, the trees weren't a problem at all. The gale scattered leaves and instantly caught up to Foursu' back.

But at that moment, Foursu jumped!

Taking the force of my wind with his body and adding it to the momentum of his leap, he performed a long-distance jump, weaving through the trees! He landed without even losing his balance and kept right on running!

"...Huh?"

The sheer absurdity of it made me stop for a second. Was that just a fluke, or did he do that on purpose?

I immediately rejected the idea that it was just a coincidence or "luck." If he had just happened to land safely, he would have looked at least a little surprised by his own fortune. But he didn't show any sign of that.

He must have sensed I was about to cast a wind spell and timed his jump perfectly to use the wind to gain distance. If that was the case, he wasn't someone I could afford to take lightly.

I stayed on his tail, but the gap wouldn't close. I kept a spell ready in my mouth so I could blast him the moment we hit an open clearing. Foursu seemed to read that too, or perhaps there just weren't any clearings, because he kept sticking to the thickets.

I wonder how long we kept up this chase?

Foursu hadn't just been running away.

Summoning magic isn't my specialty, but it's generally accepted that you need a magic circle or a pentagram to summon something large. While it *is* possible to summon using only incantations, the difficulty level is exponentially higher. Foursu had likely been scattering magical reagents or something while running from me, creating a simple summoning circle in the area.

Suddenly, Foursu shouted something. Because of the rustling leaves, I couldn't catch the words, but I realized what they were soon enough.

Eeeeeeeeee!

A shrill, ear-piercing sound like tinnitus rang out. The scenery warped and blurred for a split second, and then—

Thud!!

Suddenly, a giant slime the size of a house appeared right there! The words I hadn't caught earlier were the "Words of Power" used to trigger the spell he had set up.

The second one began sliding down the slope, snapping trees and shaking the earth, heading toward the first one.

This was bad! I couldn't let this one merge with the first one! At this point, I had to use some rougher tactics. Chanting a spell as I sprinted through the trees, I closed the distance to the slime.

"Fireball!"

K-Boom!

The orb of light I launched exploded the moment it touched the giant slime, scattering crimson flames!

Pyugeeeeeeeee!

The sound coming from the shaking mass was likely just moisture flash-boiling and evaporating from the heat, but it sounded exactly like a scream. Even a high-temperature **Fireball** couldn't incinerate this massive body in one shot, but if I hit it enough times to sap its moisture and weight, it would stop moving! There was a risk of starting a forest fire, but that was probably better than Mihai Village being crushed by a slime landslide! I planned to put the fire out properly later.

I chanted the same spell over and over, slamming them into the giant slime!

Of course, I could have used a wide-range attack spell with more destructive power to blow it away along with Foursu, but that risked catching the villagers who were in the mountains chasing him.

Through the trees, I saw Foursu wearing a cold smirk. He looked as if he wanted to say, "How futile."

Why you...! I'm going to make you cry later!

Foursu turned to move again—but his feet stopped before he could take a single step. He looked toward where his gaze had landed.

"Foursu!"

Selphie, who had arrived later than me, stopped at a distance and turned a pleading gaze toward him.

".....Selphie..."

A look of hesitation crossed Foursu' face. I kept slamming **Fireballs** into the slime while watching the two of them. I had thought about ambushing Foursu from the side,

but I decided that could wait until Selphie's persuasion failed. If I botched a sneak attack now, he might never listen to anyone ever again.

"This... this is wrong!" Selphie's pained voice echoed through the trees.

"But Selphie, I—"

"Listen to me, Foursu! I love sticky things! Just like you... no, maybe even more than you! But... I know. And you know it too, don't you? That most people in the world don't understand how great sticky things are! In fact, most people hate them!"

"—That's—"

He looked away, falling silent. She pressed on even harder.

"So what happens if you turn our village into a sticky mess? The fact that you can summon such a huge slime is a wonderful talent! You shouldn't use that talent the wrong way! Even if you and I would be overjoyed, travelers will stop coming, and the villagers will just be angry and hate you! That doesn't do any good!"

I really, *really* wanted to interject at the "you and I would be overjoyed" part, but it was clear her words were shaking Foursu' heart. It was better for me to stay quiet. I watched in silence for the time being.

"Everything you did to try and improve the village... if all your talent ends up backfiring and making the village wither away... that would be too sad, wouldn't it?"

Foursu' body swayed slightly, overwhelmed by the sincere light in Selphie's eyes.

Go for it, Selphie! Persuade him somehow!

"First of all! You should make the rest of the world outside our village sticky, and let everyone everywhere know how great sticky things are! That has to come first!"

"WHAAAAAAAAAAT!?"

Foursu and I shouted in unison.

"...Eh? Wait... what?"

As Foursu reflexively backed away, Selphie stepped closer, her eyes sparkling intensely.

"Think about it! The only reason turning the village sticky is a problem is because normal people hate sticky things! So! If you increase the number of people who love sticky things first, then there’s no problem at all with making the village sticky later!"

"Wait just a damn minute!" I finally had to call a halt to this conversation as it careened off into the horizon. "What kind of plan is that!?"

Selphie turned to me with a beaming smile. "Don't worry, Lina-san! It'll be fine!"

"What will be!? You're saying the world instead of the village!? That's even worse!"

"Now, now, just calm down and think about it! When Foursu first said he was going to make the village sticky, we didn't truly understand his power. I decided to stop him because I thought if only our village became sticky, it would just fall into ruin. But..."

"...if he can call out a slime that big, it's a different story! With Foursu' power, he can make the whole world sticky, let alone our village! If that happens, many people will realize the wonder of stickiness—a new form of happiness! This is, so to speak, a great achievement for humanity to stand on a new stage—"

Did this woman just say "a new stage"!?

"You're the one who needs to calm down!" I snapped at Selphie, who was rambling like she was in a trance. "You're just confused because your heart's been stolen by that giant slime—or rather, by stickiness! You think about it! If you try to cover the world in slime, obviously a mountain of people are going to hate it! Mihai Village's reputation will spread across the globe as 'the place where the person who made the world sticky came from'!"

"That's not true! If we continue our activities patiently, I'm sure everyone will understand the goodness of stickiness! And then, Mihai Village will become the Holy Land of Stickiness!"

"Like I’d ever let that happen!" I shouted.

To persuade them, it seemed I first needed to make Selphie understand the "charms" of stickiness. I made a direct bee-line for Foursu!

The second slime, which I had been pummeling with Fireballs earlier, had shriveled up small and was completely snagged on the trees, dead in its tracks. The first one was still slowly sliding down the slope, but it was still a good distance from the village.

However—

"I won't let you!" Selphie cried, diving into my path from the side. Was she willing to throw her life away for the sake of stickiness? Or did she actually have confidence in her fighting skills?

Either way, she was an opponent I had to take down eventually. I charged toward her without slowing down! While chanting a spell under my breath, I focused on what I needed to do most: use physical force to make Selphie and Foursu have a change of heart!

She glared at me head-on and shouted, "I won't lose—"

Selphie kept her eyes fixed on me and raised her voice: "Foursu! Summon the next slime!"

"I... I can't right away—"

"Then as fast as you can!"

"Under-Understood!" he replied, running off with a small bag in his right hand. He was likely going to draw a circle with chemicals or something inside it to summon a giant slime.

Before his words even finished, I jumped, and my knee buried itself into her face! Selphie went down incredibly easily. I kept running across the ground. Weak! You're too weak, Selphie! You've got the spirit, but you aren't even a speed bump!

It seemed he needed to draw a circle for every summons, but now that I knew that, I had a plan. Come to think of it, she had probably never seen me fight anyone before. I'm a sorceress, sure, but I can handle a sword and martial arts too. I can take down your average town thug without even using a spell. She probably charged in assuming that since I was a magic-user, I'd be bad at physical combat.

Anyway, only Foursu was left!

I chanted a spell in my head and took to the sky with high-speed flight magic! First, I soared upward through the treetops, flew straight for a bit to overtake Foursu, then descended and landed at a suitable spot ahead of him.

I began chanting my spell while waiting for him! Earlier, I hadn't flown because I was worried about him giving me the slip, but now that I knew he was moving in a circle to draw his summoning array, his path was predictable. I just had to wait for him.

Foursu, on the other hand, couldn't draw his circle without getting past me. Realizing my intent, agitation flickered across his face as he ran toward me. Even so, he kept coming—

"Freeze Arrow!"

I drew him in and unleashed the spell. Over a dozen arrows of cold air streaked straight for him! Panicked, he dove behind a nearby tree for cover.

I could just wait; I had the overwhelming advantage!

The ice arrows struck the surrounding tree trunks and the ground, freezing everything they touched. Even if they didn't hit him directly, the goal of the attack was to block his path. If he tried to force his way through the frozen, slippery terrain, his movements would be restricted no matter what.

Foursu seemed to realize this too. Using the tree he was hiding behind as a shield, he turned his back to me and started running back the way he came!

Was he trying to escape? Or was he going to try drawing the circle in the opposite direction? Either way, I wouldn't let him! I took to the sky again to cut him off. As I landed and began to chant—

"Hyaaaaaaaa!"

"Whoa?!"

A voice shrieked right next to me, and as I recoiled in surprise, Selphie lunged and latched onto my waist!

Crap! I grabbed her struggling body and pulled her close to me. I moved away a bit, not wanting her to stay tangled up with me. I realized this was the same spot where I'd kicked her earlier. I must have landed near her while she was regaining consciousness, and she lunged at me.

"Augh."

If there had been any killing intent, my body would have moved reflexively, but all I felt from her was fear. She clung to me with her eyes shut tight, her voice trembling with terror.

"F-F-Foursu! Do it now! Gooooo!"

"---I'm sorry, Selphie!" Foursu shouted as he sprinted past the two of us.

Why you...! I won't let you! I tried to chant a spell in a hurry, but—

"Nyahahaha! My sides! My sides!"

Her fingers, desperately clutching me, ended up tickling my ribs, and my chanting was cut off. In that case, I'd just knock her out! I aimed a chop at the back of her head, but she was squirming so much that my aim slipped, and it ended up being a simple chop to the top of her head.

Damn it...! I'd heard that panicked amateurs can be surprisingly difficult to deal with because their movements are so erratic, but I didn't think her movements would be *this* unreadable!

By the time I finally dealt with her, Foursu had disappeared into the trees. It wasn't impossible to chase him, but I changed my mind. Instead of just beating him down, I'd make him realize that this was all pointless. I'd let him summon the next slime on purpose, then blow it away with one big attack spell!

If he spent all that time running around drawing a circle only for me to effortlessly blow the summon away with one spell, even he would have to give up eventually. Of course, considering there might be villagers nearby, I had to be careful not to catch them in the blast. If I blew up just the top of the slime from a close distance, I could vent the force into the sky.

I stayed put and prepared to chant, then noticed Selphie was out cold. I shook off her limp body. This time for sure, my hand-strike had knocked her out.

Eventually, Foursu returned after drawing his circle. He found me standing there with a composed look while Selphie lay on the ground. He looked shaken seeing her like that, but when he saw I wasn't moving to attack him, he kept his eyes on me and began his summoning chant.

Soon, he completed the spell and shouted the "Words of Power" to activate it. At the top of the slope, a giant... thing appeared.

Just then, Selphie regained consciousness. She looked around, sat up, and saw it. "Foursu! You called the slime!"

"Yeah! But don't let your guard down, Selphie! That woman is up to something!"

While the two of them exchanged words, I stared half-dazed at the quivering, giant mass. I slowly pointed at it.

"...Hey... I know this is a weird question to ask at this late stage..."

My thoughts ground to a halt in sheer shock.

"Wait, could it be... that's not a slime, but a jellyfish?"

There was a high-pitched ringing in my ears. A split second later, their voices harmonized in a startled, "Huh? Quivering!"

I forgot I was even supposed to be chanting a spell and just stared at it. Foursu's provocation reached me: "You're awfully relaxed! I don't know what you're planning, but let's see you try it!"

...No way... It couldn't be... but that thing... Confused, I didn't know what to do, so I just stared at the semi-transparent giant mass... and then it hit me!

I kept talking, regardless of their reaction. "I have this acquaintance who's a weird sorceress... and the spell and 'Words of Power' she uses to call jellyfish are almost identical to what Foursu just used... By the way, she's a woman with long black hair, dresses weird, and has a loud, annoying laugh..."

Foursu's voice cracked with shock. "No way...? You know Professor Naga?"

I let out a groan of pure despair. Naga. That was the name of the woman who called herself my rival—a purely bothersome entity. She was always showing up in front of me and making things complicated. To think she'd managed to complicate things without even being here...

In a weary tone, I asked, "So... let me guess. Foursu, you were passionately talking about slimes somewhere, she ran into you, and she sold you that spell for a fee? Something like that?"

The answer was obvious from the way he went silent and his face twisted.

Hearing our exchange, Selphie suddenly ran toward the giant, quivering mass. We waited in silence until she came running back with teary eyes. Her first words were:

"It’s... it's not sticky!!"

It was a jellyfish.

After a long, long silence, Foursu finally spoke. "What do we do now?"

"Well... for starters—" I began, thinking as I spoke. "If we just say 'I blew them away with an attack spell and they reflected on their actions,' I don't think the villagers will be that mad anymore."

Foursu and Selphie looked at each other, nodded, and then knelt in formal *seiza* before me. They bowed deeply and said in unison:

"We humbly ask for your favor!"

I nodded, and then I began my chant to blow them both away.

And so, the "World Stickiness Project," which had aimed to cause a massive shift in human values, ended in failure. I disposed of the giant jellyfish on the mountain with fire spells—making sure to properly extinguish everything so as not to start a forest fire, of course.

When I returned to the village and explained the situation, everyone was surprisingly quick to accept it. I think the sight of Selphie and Foursu, whom I’d beaten black and blue with my spells, was the ultimate convincing argument.

However, as long as there are people in this world who love sticky things, someone might one day plot a World Stickiness Project again. Even Selphie and Foursu, who have given up for now, might harbor such ambitions once more.

If... someone near you ever becomes obsessed with the ambition of stickiness... for now, I think it’s okay to hit them until they cry.

(The Season of Stickyness: Finished)

Afterword

Author: Recently, the refrigerator broke down!

L: You hate maintaining it that much?!

Author: Just a little while ago, I thought, "It's not cooling very well, is it?" But now, I, who have accomplished the great feat of cleaning my room—something I can only manage once every ten years—fear nothing! If the freezer is broken, then I must act!

One day, I reached for some frozen udon in the freezer to eat as a late-night snack. The texture, which should have been rock-solid...

L: Wow! You cleaned your room a little bit and now you're looking down on everyone!

Author: ...felt like fresh noodles!

L: Whaaaaaaat!?

Author: Wait, but what about the air conditioner?

L: That... is completely finished...

Author: Ah. Yeah. I couldn't get around to cleaning that part yet. Just the fridge for now.

L: You haven't finished cleaning at all!

Author: In the end, when I put bottled drinks in the freezer, they didn't freeze; they just got ice-cold!

L: The ice cream we had in stock went past the "shake" stage and turned into gel!

Author: Since the ice stayed melted but present, it must have been right around 0 degrees.

L: So, you're buying a new one.

Author: Yep!

L: Ultimately, if there’s going to be construction for the air conditioner, you’re going to have to clean more anyway, right?

Author: ...Yeah... actually, that’s true... But don't misunderstand! I am not like those people who appear in "The Labyrinth of Chaos" who claim they feel more relaxed when things are cluttered, or that they know exactly where everything is even if it looks messy to others!

I just purely, simply, find cleaning to be a pain in the neck and I hate it!

L: You're even more hopeless than them!

Author: I decided to just go for it! After I cleared out about ten more garbage bags worth of junk, I finally achieved a "Limit Break" rank-up to a "Normally Messy Room"!

L: That is not a "Limit Break"! Go all the way to "Clean Room"! If anything, it’s weird that you’re satisfied with a "Normally Messy Room" to the point where the word "messy" doesn't even hurt your feelings anymore!

Author: Hmph. Bark all you want.

L: Normally, I’d grind you into dust while delivering a retort, but well, since you're in this state, I'll go easy on you. I'll settle for just flipping over every single shelf in this room you worked so hard to somewhat clean.

Author: No, please, anything but that!

L: I'd rather just grind you up instead!

Author: Well, I'll do my best to keep cleaning. Everyone, make sure you clean your rooms frequently so you don't end up like me. See you later!

L: Oh, he started crying face-down. Maybe I feel a little bit bad for him.

Afterword: The End

Selfish L-pyon activates!

"I want to eat taiyaki~~!!!"

"It can't be helped... Search Eye!!"

"I found a great shop, L-sama♪"

"L-pyon's extra stomach, here I go~♪"

Munch munch

"Hmph. It suddenly glowed gold and looked impressive, but it’s sunk... I don't remember eating it?"

"Heartburn Big Sister, three more servings, please!"

"Sorry, we're out of stock."

"I don't feel like losing!!"

"Aw, maybe next time... How's that?"

One afternoon.

"It's super convenient not to get heartburn, right, L-pyon♪"

The Labyrinth of Chaos

The TV anime *Slayers EVOLUTION-R* began broadcasting! As for the transition of the author's room, it went exactly as described in the afterword. So, here is Lina-chin watching TV under the kotatsu.

Slayers Smash. Extra Project #2: The Sticky Season
Serialized Title Illustration

This title page was much stickier than the actual text. I hate this kind of room!